

LIPPINCOTT'S  
MONTHLY MAGAZINE

SEPTEMBER, 1903



## THE BLADE THAT WON

BY BURTON EGBERT STEVENSON

*Author of "At Odds with the Regent," etc.*

## I.

## I CHANCE UPON AN ADVENTURE

IT was at the corner of the Rue Gogard that I saw her first. You may, perhaps, recall the place if you know Montauban. A great barrack of a building, time-stained and neglected, blocks the way as one turns into it from the Rue Pluvis. Before the building is a high wall, pierced by a single gateway. The door is of oak, four inches thick and heavily barred with iron,—Vincennes has few stronger,—wherefrom it may be seen that he who erected the building was a man who had his enemies.

The gate held my eye as I turned the corner, and just as I reached it, it was flung open with a crash, and a girl rushed into the street. She stopped as she saw me standing there, and my hat was sweeping the pavement as I caught her eyes on mine.

"You seem a man of honor," she said, and pressed her hand against her breast as though to calm the beating of her heart.

"A thousand thanks, Mademoiselle," I answered, and I saw that even the stark emotion which possessed her could not destroy the beauty of her face. "Believe me, I shall be most happy to prove it."

"You have a sword?" she asked, still eying me with attention.

I threw back my cloak and touched the hilt.

"And know how to use it?"

"Try me, Mademoiselle," I said simply.

The color swept back into her face and her eyes narrowed with sudden resolution.

"Then follow me, Monsieur," she said, and turned back through the gateway.

I was at her heels as she ran across the little court and plunged into a dark doorway beyond. I paused an instant to draw my sword, dropping my cloak that it might not encumber me, and then clattered up the stair behind her. It was dark and narrow and of many turnings, so that she, who knew the place, had reached the top while I was stumbling along midway, cursing the darkness. But she awaited me, and as I reached her side held out her hand to me. My own closed over it in an instant and found it soft and warm and trembling. Here was an adventure after my own heart, and I had had so few adventures!

"Cautiously, Monsieur!" she whispered, and led the way along a narrow hall to the right. The darkness was absolute, the atmosphere hot and stifling. I began to wonder if I had walked into a trap, but that warm little hand in mine reassured me. Besides, who could know my errand from Marsan, and, not knowing it, who would set a trap for so small a bird as I? Then, suddenly, as we turned a corner, I heard the sound of angry voices and saw a light streaming redly through an open doorway. In a moment we had reached it, and I paused in astonishment as I saw what lay within.

There was a great fire blazing on the hearth, which threw into sharp relief a bed with disordered hangings, an open desk with papers overflowing from it to the floor, a chair overturned, even the tapestry upon the walls. But it was at none of these I looked, though I found them all etched into my memory afterwards. It was at a man bound to a chair, at two others who were glancing hastily through the papers they were pulling from the drawers of the desk, at a fourth who was making an iron turn white in the glow of the fire. The man in the chair was watching the door with agonized eyes, but of the faces of the others I could see nothing, for they were masked.

Even as I stood there, palsied by astonishment, the man at the fire drew forth the iron and turned with it sputtering in his hand.

"Come, M. le Comte," he said, "I think this will answer," and he advanced towards the prisoner.

But the girl was through the doorway ere he had taken a second step.

"You curs! You cowards!" she screamed, and ran at him as though to wrench the hissing iron from his hands. But her voice had loosed the chains which bound me, and I sprang after her, drew her back with one hand, and while the man stood for an instant agape at this interruption, ran him through the breast. As he felt my sword in his flesh he raised his hand and threw the iron full at me, but I stepped aside and avoided it, and he fell in a heap on the hearth. The others were upon me almost before I could turn, and with the suddenness of their rush drove me into a corner, where, in truth, I was very glad

to go, and get my back snugly against the wall. The moment I felt their blades against my own I knew I had swordsmen to deal with. For a breath I held them off, then I saw them exchange a glance, and as one knocked up my blade, the other ran me through the shoulder. It had been my heart, but that I sprang to the right. In the instant that followed I saw my chance and thrust full at my opponent, who had left his breast uncovered, but my point rang against a net of steel and the blade shivered in my grasp.

"Well thrust," he said, laughing harshly. "'Tis a pity so pretty a swordsman must die so young. Come, Gaspard, let us finish," and he advanced to thrust again. I had my poniard out, but knew it would be of little service.

And then, as I steeled myself for this last attack, commending my soul to the Virgin, I saw a white arc of sputtering iron sweep through the air and hiss deep into the cheek of the man in armor. He fell back with a terrible cry, and, dropping his sword, clapped his hands to his face. The other stood for an instant dazed, then, with an oath, caught up his companion and plunged into the darkness of the hall without. I heard his footsteps echoing along it for a moment, then all was still. Only the girl stood there with the bar of iron still in her hand.

"I thank you, Mademoiselle," I said. "In another moment I had been beyond assistance."

She smiled at me tremulously and cast the iron down upon the hearth. Plainly, she was not used to scenes of violence, and had small relish for them.

"Come," I continued, "let us release the prisoner," and with my poniard I cut the ropes which encircled him. He arose from the chair unsteadily, stretched his limbs, and looked at me with a good-humored light in his eyes.

"In faith, Monsieur," he said, "you arrived most opportunely. I admit I have no appetite for white-hot iron. I am a man of the pen, not of the sword. Accept my thanks," and he bowed with a certain dignity.

I bowed in return, not to be outdone in courtesy, and then of a sudden I felt my strength drop from me, and sat down limply on the chair from which I had just released him.

"Oh, you are wounded!" cried the girl. "See, uncle, here in his shoulder," and before I could prevent it she had sunk to her knees beside me and was tearing away my doublet. In a trice my shoulder was bare, and she examined the wound with compressed lips, touching it with intelligent fingers that bespoke her convent training.

"It is nothing," I protested weakly. "A mere flesh-wound. Do not trouble about it, I beg of you, Mademoiselle. I shall be myself again in a moment."

But the man interrupted me.

"Nonsense!" he said curtly, and he too looked at the wound. "Claire," he added, "bring a basin of water and a clean rag. We will soon repair this damage."

I followed her with my eyes as she ran to do his bidding. So her name was Claire, and I repeated it over and over to myself, as a man rolls wine in his mouth to get the full flavor. She was soon back, and the wound washed clean and deftly bandaged.

"There," he said at last, "I think that will do. I do not believe the hurt a dangerous one, Monsieur, but you would best consult without delay a more skilful surgeon than either Claire or I. There is only one thing more I can do for you," and he opened a cupboard in the wall and brought out a flask of wine. "Drink this," he said, and handed me a glass brimming over. I drained it at a draught.

"A thousand thanks," I said. "I am quite myself again. I trust Mademoiselle will pardon my momentary weakness."

She smiled happily as she looked at me.

"Oh, yes, Monsieur," she answered after a moment, "I think I could find it in my heart to pardon a much more serious offence," and her face grew rosy with sudden blushes, in fear, doubtless, that she had said too much. I could guess that she had seen little of the world, and that its strangeness frightened her.

Her companion interrupted me before I could find words for a reply.

"May I ask the name of our rescuer? We shall wish always to remember it with gratitude."

"Paul de Marsan," I answered simply.

He started, and I saw the girl's face turn white.

"Liege to the Comte de Cadillac?" he asked quickly.

I bowed.

"I came to Montauban to see him," I said, wondering at his emotion.

"But must you see him?" he persisted.

"At the earliest moment."

He waved his hand with a gesture of despair and stood for a little time, his head bent in thought.

"M. de Marsan," he began at last, "I fear we have done you ill-service by calling you here to-day——"

But I stopped him before he could say more.

"Ill service!" I cried. "Ill service to give my sword a chance at three consummate scoundrels, and me an opportunity of meeting Mademoiselle! Do me a thousand such ill services, Monsieur!"

His was a merry spirit when no danger threatened, and I saw a jest spring to life in his eyes.



"A chance to meet a thousand pretty girls?" he asked.

But he was not to catch me so.

"On the contrary, a thousand chances to meet Mademoiselle," I answered boldly, though the boldness was no deeper than the lips, and from the corner of my eye I saw the girl blush hotly.

He glanced from me to her and back again. The mirth died out of his face, as heat from a bed of ashes, and left it cold and gray.

"I fear that may not be, Monsieur," he said gravely. "Our way is not your way, as you will soon know for yourself. But, at least, I can give you a friend in place of the one you have lost here."

He signed to Claire, and she ran to an adjoining room, returning in a moment with a sword in a scabbard of stout leather.

"Gird him," he said.

She came to me shyly, and taking the old scabbard from my belt, clasped the new one there. I trembled at the touch of her fingers, and gripped my hands behind me to keep my arms from about her. I could see the red blood surging in waves over cheek and neck as I looked down at her, but only when she had finished the task did she lift her eyes to mine for an instant. What eyes they were—dark, lustrous, with the white soul looking out!

"Draw your blade," commanded the other.

As I obeyed and its polished sides caught the firelight I saw it was no ordinary weapon.

"Test it," he said.

I bent it to left and right. It gave in my hands like some living thing.

"'Twill take a stout coat of mail to turn it aside," he said. "'Tis a Toledo."

I flushed with joy at possessing such a weapon and tried to stammer my thanks, but he cut me off.

"There, there," he said, not unkindly. "Keep your thanks. I doubt you will soon find you have little enough cause for gratitude. But 'tis the utmost I can do for you, for 'tis very unlike we shall ever meet again."

"But your name," I stammered. "Surely I may know your name."

He hesitated a moment, then shook his head impatiently, as though casting some weakness from him.

"My name is of small moment," he said. "You may call me Duval. That will serve as well as any other."

"But, Monsieur," I protested, "I hope to see you many times again—you and Mademoiselle," and I stole a glance at her, but her eyes were fixed on the floor.

Duval came to me and took my hand.

"Believe me, M. de Marsan," he said earnestly, "I honor you and

value your friendship highly, but for your own sake you must not meet us again. Indeed, 'twill do you little good to try, since in an hour we shall be far from here, in a country it were death for you to penetrate."

I gazed at him, too astonished to reply.

"I will ask you one more favor," he added. "Will you assist me in carrying yonder fellow to the bed? We must give him a chance, if he has a spark of life left in him."

"Willingly," I answered, and between us we raised the man, who lay where he had fallen, and stretched him on the couch. He gave no sign of life and I thought him done for, but when the doublet was stripped from his breast I saw that the blood was still slowly oozing from the wound which my sword had made. Duval hesitated an instant and then lifted the mask from his face. I had never seen the man before, but he had a strong, bold countenance, with something of power in it.

"That was the master against whose cuirass you broke your sword, M. de Marsan," remarked Duval, and then as he met my inquiring glance he added, "Believe me, I appreciate your courtesy, Monsieur, in refraining from questioning me, but it is a matter it were best for you to know nothing of, even were I at liberty to explain it. And now I must ask you to leave us, for we have much to do."

"We will meet again," I said earnestly as I took his hand.

But he merely shook his head.

"Claire will accompany you to the street," he said, and turned away to his disordered desk.

I followed her without a word along the hallway and down the dark stair; but at the foot I caught her hand and held it.

"Can it be, Mademoiselle," I asked, "that this is adieu? Surely you do not believe so!"

"I fear I must believe so, Monsieur," she answered softly. "Only I wish myself to thank you for your gallantry and courage. They were given to a good cause, believe me."

"And will be given again to the same cause!" I cried. "I warn you, Mademoiselle, that I shall not submit so tamely to this decree of separation."

She pressed my fingers gently and withdrew her hand.

"Come," she said, "I must return," and she went on across the little court and to the gate, which still hung open as we had left it. "Adieu, Monsieur," she said, and held out her hand again.

I raised it to my lips and kissed it.

"It is not adieu," I said. "I will not have it so. I shall see you again many times," but as I looked into her eyes I felt my certainty slipping from me, and with it my self-control.

Perhaps she read my thought, for she drew her hand away and made ready to close the gate.

"Adieu, Monsieur," she repeated, and I saw that her eyes were bright with tears.

I sprang to her and caught both her hands in mine.

"But, Claire," I cried, "at least, tell me that you are sorry; tell me that you care; tell me that you would not have it so!"

She looked up into my face and her lips were quivering.

"I have had many disappointments," she said. "One more will matter little. You must go, Monsieur. To detain me here is to endanger both of us."

"As you will," I said, and I dropped her hands and turned to the gate. "Only in this, Mademoiselle, you shall not be disappointed. I swear it. Au revoir."

I stepped through to the street and turned with bared head and trembling hands for a last glimpse of her. For an instant she held the gate half open and gazed into my eyes. Then she shut it fast, the bar dropped into place, and I heard her footsteps slowly cross the court.

## II.

### I WALK INTO A HORNET'S NEST

THE vesper bell of a near-by priory waked me out of my thoughts. I remembered with a start that the business which had brought me to Montauban was as yet undone, and I hastened my steps towards the hotel of the Comte de Cadillac, which stood, as I very well knew, on the right bank of the Garonne, as one approaches it from the south along the Rue du Midi. It was not till then that the increasing cold of evening drew my attention to the fact that I no longer had my cloak about me, and I remembered that I had not thought to pick it up again as I passed the place where I had dropped it, so absorbed had I been in my companion. I reflected with satisfaction that I had chosen an old one in which to make this journey, not only that I might be the less an object of notice, but also because I did not know to what vicissitude of weather I might be subjected ere I was back again beside the fire at Marsan.

Night had settled upon the town before I reached the Rue du Midi and turned up towards the river, but I did not slacken my pace until I saw gleaming before me the great torches which at night-time always flamed on either side the wide gate to the Hotel de Cadillac. There was the usual crowd of lacqueys and men-at-arms loitering about it, and I made my way through them without hindrance, across the inner court, and up the steps to the great doorway. Here a sentry stopped me.

"I wish to see M. le Comte," I said. "I have an important message for him from Marsan."

The fellow looked me over for a moment, plainly little impressed by my appearance.

"Very well, Monsieur," he said at last. "Come with me."

Midway of the hall a group had gathered about a man who was talking excitedly, and from the faces of his listeners I judged it was no ordinary bit of gossip he was imparting. I caught a few words as we made a way through the crowd.

"It is most curious," the speaker was saying. "No one can imagine how it occurred. And right across the face too."

"What is it?" I asked my guide when once we were past the crowd. "What has happened?"

But he merely shook his head, as though it were not his business nor mine, and kept on without replying. I promised myself that I should some day repay him twice over for his insolence. The blood is warm at twenty!

He turned to the right through an open doorway and stopped before a man who was walking soberly up and down, his chin in his hand, his brows knitted.

"M. d'Aurilly," he said, "here is a youngster who says he has a message for M. le Comte."

My cheeks flushed at his tone, and I bit my lips to keep back the retort which would have burst from them.

D'Aurilly stopped abruptly in his walk and looked at me.

"That will do, Bricette," he said to the sentry after a moment, and stood looking at me until the sound of his footsteps died away down the corridor. I could see that he was searching me through and through, and no whit abashed, for I come of as good blood as any in Gascony, I gave him look for look.

"So you have a message?" he asked at last.

"Yes, Monsieur," I answered, and as I looked into his face I saw that his eyes glittered under half-closed lids, that his nose arched like an eagle's beak, and that the thick mustachio could not wholly conceal the cruel lines about the mouth. Verily, I thought, there seem to be few pleasant people in the household of M. le Comte de Cadillac.

"And where is this message from?" he continued.

"From Marsan, Monsieur."

"And you are?"

"Paul de Marsan, Monsieur."

He looked at me yet a moment, his eyes glittering behind their veil of lashes like snakes in ambush.

"Very well," he said abruptly. "Give me this message. I will deliver it to M. le Comte."

And he held out his hand.

"Impossible, Monsieur," I answered. "I was instructed to deliver it only to M. le Comte himself."

Again he paused to look me up and down, and I saw the hot color of the south leap to his cheeks.

"Perhaps you do not know that I am the Vicomte d'Aurilly," he sneered at last.

"I heard the sentry call you so, Monsieur," I answered, bowing. I did not add that I thought it strange he should be in the household and seemingly so near the person of M. le Comte—for his estates lay far south on the border of the Pyrenees, and had always been reckoned more Spanish than French.

"Come," he cried roughly, "enough of this play! Give me the message. M. le Comte is ill and will see no one."

"Then I will wait till he is well again, Monsieur," I said as calmly as I could, and made for the door, head in air.

But his voice arrested me.

"Stop, you fool!" he cried.

I turned upon him, all my blood in my face.

"That is not the way one gentleman addresses another, Monsieur," I said between my teeth. "I must ask Monsieur to apologize."

"Apologize!" he cried, purple with rage. "Upon my word, these Gascon paupers are insufferable!"

But I could bear no more. My self-control dropped from me as cloak from shoulder, and I sprang upon him and struck him full in the mouth with my open hand. He had his poniard out in an instant and lunged at me,—which I thought a cowardly thing,—but I stepped back out of harm's reach and whipped out my sword before he could strike a second time. He paused when he saw my point at his breast:

"Now," I said, "perhaps Monsieur will draw and fight like a gentleman, not like a blackguard."

I thought he would choke with rage. And at that instant an inner door opened and a man stepped through. He stopped in amazement as he saw our attitude.

"What is this, d'Aurilly?" he asked sternly. "A duel—and in M. le Comte's antechamber? Surely you know his need of quiet!"

D'Aurilly turned to the newcomer, his face working with passion.

"I was pressed beyond endurance, M. Letourge," he said. "Look at this," and he pointed to the mark of my hand still on his face.

"A blow!" and Letourge looked at me wrathfully. "Who are you, Monsieur, that you dare strike the Vicomte d'Aurilly?"

But my blood was up and my eyes were full on his. In my heart I knew that his eyes were honest eyes and his face an honest face, albeit a stern one.

"A gentleman whom he had insulted, Monsieur," I answered proudly. "We of Marsan permit that from no man."

But Letourge's face had changed. He stood staring at me with starting eyes, as though not able to believe them. Then he pulled himself together and his face became like marble, lighted by two coals of fire.

"You are a bold man, Monsieur," he said at last, in a voice that chilled me, "to set foot in this house. Methinks you will never leave it with your breath in your body."

Now it was my turn to stare.

"Is M. le Comte de Cardillac a second Pharaoh," I asked, "that he should slay his messengers? Had I known that, I had made less haste from Marsan in his service."

Letourge had recovered his self-control, but I saw that his hands were trembling.

"From Marsan?" he repeated. "And when came you from Marsan?"

"An hour ago," I answered.

"And you have a message?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"You lie!" he cried. "You must think our memories marvellous short! M. le Comte does not slay messengers, but he hangs spies. Do you not already feel the rope about your neck, Monsieur?"

I looked into his eyes and saw he was in earnest. What could the man mean? I realized that I had need to keep my wits about me.

"Monsieur," I said with what calmness I could muster, "you have used words to me which you will some day regret. I am Paul de Marsan and no spy. We of Marsan have been liege to Cadillac for two hundred years and have always aided them to fight their battles. I come to warn M. le Comte of a great danger which threatens him, but seem to have fallen into a nest of madmen."

But Letourge looked at me with working lips.

"Think not your tongue can save your head," he sneered. "You have come to the end of the journey. Will you lay down your sword, or shall I call in a dozen lacqueys to take it from you?"

There was but one course for a gentleman to choose. I glanced desperately about the room. He and d'Aurilly stood between me and the door into the outer hall. There was only one other, the door through which he had entered.

"Monsieur," I cried, "I shall not lay down my sword until my hand is powerless to hold it!"

With a cry of rage he sprang towards the hall to summon aid, but with one bound I was at the other door, and felt with joy that it yielded to my touch. As I slammed it shut behind me I saw that it had a bolt



on the inner side, and shot it into place just as those without threw themselves against it. It could hold but a few moments at the most, and I cast my eyes about the room for some way of escape.

I saw that I was in a sleeping-room, the great, curtained bed occupying one side. A single candle burning on a table near it illumined the room but feebly, yet there was light enough to show me a window opposite the bed. I ran to it and threw back the shutter with a crash. The window was barred. I glanced again about the room. There was no other window—no other door but that by which I had entered, and which was already creaking under the blows of those without. I must die here, then, like a rat in a trap. Well, I would not die alone!

"What is this?" cried a voice from the bed. "Name of God! Did I not tell you, Gaspard, that I wanted quiet? Are you pulling the house down? Answer me, man!"

The curtains were pulled apart and a face appeared between them—a horrible face, swollen and bandaged. He listened a moment to the blows and cries without, then got unsteadily to his feet and took a sword from the chair at his bedside, cursing softly to himself the while. And as he turned his eyes fell upon me.

"Who are you?" he asked. "What do you here?"

A spark of hope sprang to life in my breast.

"I am Paul de Marsan," I said. "I have a message for M. le Comte de Cadillac."

He sat down heavily upon a chair.

"Very well," he said. "I am he. But that does not explain this cursed uproar."

My hat was off and I was on my knee before him in an instant. Perhaps here I should get justice. The door was already splitting. I had need to speak quickly.

"M. le Comte," I cried, "believe me, I am your faithful and devoted servant. I have journeyed fifty leagues to bring you a message of great moment to your house. I arrived but a moment since, and when I came here and asked to see you that I might give you this message, I was called a spy, set upon, and threatened with the gibbet."

"But why—why?" he asked.

"I do not know, Monsieur," I answered.

He looked me for an instant in the eyes.

"M. de Marsan," he said, "I believe you. Get behind my chair. I will protect you from these fools."

It was time. Even as he spoke there came a mighty crash against the door, as of a heavy log hurled upon it, and it leaped from its hinges. The mob poured into the room, headed by d'Aurilly and Letourge. For an instant, in the semi-darkness, they did not see me standing there behind their master, then they were upon me with a yell of rage.

But M. le Comte was out of his chair, his sword ready to strike.

"One step more," he cried, "and I strike! Letourge, d'Aurilly, you shall answer for this with your necks! Are you mad?"

The mob stopped on the instant. Plainly they knew that when their master struck, he struck home.

"He is a spy, Monsieur!" cried Letourge. "He hath come hither to assassinate you—to complete the work he began in the Rue Gogard!"

M. le Comte started round upon me, his eyes wild with passion. He snatched the candle from the table and thrust it near my face, his lips a-quiver. He held it a moment so, and then set it down again.

"M. de Marsan," he said, in a voice shaking with rage, "what bravado brought you here I cannot guess, or what hope you could have had that once my hand was on you, you could escape my vengeance!"

I stood staring at him with open mouth. Had he too gone mad?

"Were it not for this wound which crazes me," he went on after a moment, "I would have you hung this instant. But I myself am hungering to see you kick your life out at a rope's end, so we must defer that pleasure till to-morrow. Take him, men!" he added, and stepped suddenly away from me.

They came on with a yell, and I had but time to slash open the face of the first one, when they had me down, and I thought for a moment would tear me limb from limb. But their master quieted them with the back of his sword as he would have quieted a pack of hounds.

"To the lower dungeon with him!" he cried, and stood watching as they dragged me away, his hands to his face, his eyes dark with pain and rage. I would have spoken even then, and the words might have saved me, but that d'Aurilly clapped his hand upon my mouth, and with a curse bade me hold my tongue. Out into the hall they dragged me, using me more roughly now that they were from under their master's eyes, and down a long flight of steps. At the stair-foot they paused a moment and I heard the rattle of bolts. A door was clanged back and I was pitched forward into the inky pit beyond.

### III.

#### I FIND THE KEY TO THE PUZZLE

I LAY for some time where I had fallen, nursing my bruises and reflecting with bitterness upon the singular gratitude of princes. I was dazed by the suddenness, the unexpectedness, of it all. What had I done that I should be treated so? And then, of a sudden, a flash of light broke in upon me and brought me to my feet. What was it Letourge had said, "He will finish the work he began in the Rue Gogard." The Rue Gogard was where I had met Claire. Could it be that it was Letourge and M. le Comte whom I had resisted there; that it was into

the face of M. le Comte himself that white-hot iron had seared? I shuddered as I recalled the hiss of the iron into his flesh, the smell of burning, his cry of agony? Small wonder he should thirst for vengeance! Death on the gibbet would be merciful beside the torture which he had suffered and which he must suffer still.

I sat down again to think it out. Yes, there could be no doubt of it—I had been blind not to see it before. The man in armor had been called "M. le Comte" in Duval's room; he had called his companion Gaspard, and it was Gaspard whom he had cursed from his bed. Gaspard, of course, was Letourge. And then Duval's despair when I had told him who I was—oh, there could be no doubt of it! And in a breath I saw the full peril of my position.

Here, then, was I, Paul de Marsan, about to be hanged by order of the Comte de Cadillac, whose family we of Marsan had served faithfully for two centuries and more, and whose favor I had thought to win. It had remained for me to be the first to betray him—though how was I to know?—and to be the first of the Marsans to die with a rope about his neck. I saw tumbling about my ears all those pretty castles in the air which I had spent so much time in building while floating along the Midouze or taking a lesson with the sword from old Maître Perigneau, who had tested his art by my father's side—and my grandfather's, as well—in a hundred battles. It is not a pleasant thing when one is only twenty, with a heart warm for adventure, to see just ahead the end of the path—and such an end! More shaken than I cared to own, I rose again to my feet and determined to find out the nature of this place into which I had been cast. Perhaps I might yet escape, and M. le Comte would be less vengeful once his wound had healed.

The cell was not large, as I discovered by feeling my way along the walls, all of great stones, delicately fitted,—ten feet square at the most,—and the low, iron-studded door the only opening. Plainly, I could not go out until that door was opened, and the path from it to the gibbet seemed like to be a short one. I stood for a time leaning against it. At last, overcome by weariness and despair, I sank down into one corner and dropped into a troubled sleep.

Then, of a sudden, I awoke to feel my wrists seized by iron hands and twisted behind me. I struggled till my heart seemed like to burst, certain that this was the end, but those great hands clung to me and would not be shaken off.

"Hold him so," a voice whispered, and the hands tightened.

I lay still, the sweat starting from my forehead, waiting the blow that would end it. A hand tore the doublet from my breast,—there was a moment's silence broken only by the crackling of a paper,—then the voice whispered again,—

"Strike him!"

A great blow fell upon my head.

I opened my eyes to find a tall fellow bending over me and dashing water into my face. Another stood near by holding a torch. A flare of light came from the doorway, and I heard voices and the clank of arms without.

"He's coming round," said the fellow with the torch, seeing my eyes open. "He must have struck his head when we pitched him in here. Lucky for us his skull is thick. Again, Blatot."

And the other deluged me again with water.

I sat upright, sputtering, dazed, suffocated.

"What is it?" I asked so soon as I could get my breath. "Do you want to choke me?"

"No, we'll leave that to the hangman," answered Blatot grimly. "Just now we are to take you before M. le Comte. I advise you to go quietly."

"I will go gladly," I said, for I had feared another answer. Besides, now that I held the key to the puzzle, I might find a way out. "Lead the way."

They fell into place about me and we toiled up the steps to the hall above. As we reached the stair-head I saw it was full day. Down the hall we turned, into the room where I had first met d'Aurilly, and across it to the chamber beyond.

It was crowded with M. le Comte's retainers, and they must have got some wind of my adventure, for a hum of anger greeted my entrance. M. le Comte himself was seated in a great fauteuil, his face still bandaged, but seemingly giving him less pain than it had the night before. D'Aurilly stood beside him, and he smiled maliciously as he noted my torn and disordered clothing, drenched with water, and the bruises on my head and face. Plainly he had not forgot that blow on the mouth—at which I did not greatly wonder, for neither should I have forgot it.

"M. de Marsan," said M. le Comte, when I stood before him, "I have had you brought here in place of ordering you straight to the gallows that you may answer certain questions I have to ask of you. 'Twill be wise on your part to answer them fully and truthfully."

"I shall be glad to answer every question Monsieur may please to ask," I answered, overjoyed that he should begin so mildly. "I shall be only too happy to tell Monsieur everything I know."

"That is well," and his brow cleared a little. "You may perhaps yet save your neck. Now answer me. Where was it you last saw the Duc de Roquefort?"

"M. le Comte," I answered simply, "I have never in my whole life seen the Duc de Roquefort."

His brows contracted and he brought his hand down with a crash upon the arm of his chair.

"By God! M. de Marsan," he cried, "you seem to set small value on that head of yours! You will be denying next that it was you who came to the rescue of that cursed, cowardly henchman of his, Brissac, just when I had him where he must have given up certain papers. You will be denying that it was you who spitted Bastien, who caused me to suffer this wound across the face," and he pointed to his bandaged cheek with a terrible gesture that sent the blood back to my heart.

"I deny nothing, Monsieur," I protested, "but I beg you to believe that I did not know it was you I was resisting or your enemies I was aiding."

"M. le Comte," broke in d'Aurilly, with an evil light in his eyes, "has not this farce gone far enough? Why keep this liar longer from the rope?"

"Why, indeed?" repeated M. le Comte, looking at me darkly. "Do you persist in your denials, M. de Marsan?"

And then of a sudden I remembered the message. With feverish fingers I sought to draw it from my bosom—it was not there! In a flash I understood—the assault in the dungeon, the tearing of my doublet, the rustling of a paper!

"It has been stolen!" I cried hoarsely, my throat on fire. "Some one has stolen it from me!"

I caught d'Aurilly's eyes on mine, and my heart grew hot with hate as I marked the sneer on his lips.

"What has been stolen?" demanded M. le Comte impatiently. "No tricks, M. de Marsan!"

I clinched my hands to still their trembling until the blood started beneath the nails.

"M. le Comte," I began, "hear me to the end. I came to Montauban from Marsan as fast as horse could carry me that I might place in your hand a message which concerns you deeply. You know what my reception was, but you do not know that after I had been thrown into yonder dungeon someone crept upon me while I slept and tore the message from my bosom. See, here is where I carried it. You have a traitor in your house, Monsieur!"

His face was red, and I could hear the stir in the circle of men-at-arms behind me. Only d'Aurilly laughed harshly.

"A pretty story!" he cried. "A brazen lie! Does not your patience near an end, M. le Comte?"

But I looked only at my master. Surely he must see that I spoke the truth!

"M. le Comte will remember," I concluded, "that I told him of this message in his sleeping-room, but he would not hear me out. The



one who robbed me must have known I carried it, yet I told no one save yourself, the sentry at the outer door, M. Letourge, and—the Vicomte d'Aurilly."

I was looking full at him now, and I think he read the meaning of my look, for his face went white, and I could see his hand gripping his sword-hilt. And in that instant I knew who the traitor was!

"Good God, M. le Comte!" he burst out, "do you permit us to be insulted by this scoundrel?"

But my master waved him to silence. His face was very stern and his voice cold as steel when he spoke again.

"You make grave charges, M. de Marsan," he said,—“so grave that either your head or another's will fall. Do you know the contents of this message?"

"I do, Monsieur," I answered, and I saw d'Aurilly go white again. "I have been trying to tell it you. I learned it by rote that I might repeat it in case I was intercepted and so, compelled to destroy it. I had not foreseen it would be stolen from me at my journey's end."

"Well, repeat it then, man!" he cried, moving in his seat uneasily. "Out with it!"

"M. le Duc de Roquefort," I repeated, "has learned of the presence of Madame la Comtesse at the Château de Cadillac, together with Mademoiselle, her daughter. He has learned also that not above thirty men can be mustered to defend the place. He designs to carry it by surprise and to take prisoner Madame and Mademoiselle, confident that with them as hostages he can secure certain concessions from M. le Comte. There is need of haste!"

I could hear the crowd behind me breathing hard. A murmur of rage and astonishment ran from mouth to mouth, and I heard the rattle of a hundred scabbards as hand fell to hilt. M. le Comte was trembling with emotion.

"And the signature!" he cried, bending down from his chair till his eyes glared into mine. "The signature, Monsieur!"

"I know nothing of the signature," I said. "It was not given to me."

"But whence came the message? Prove to me that it is genuine—that it may be believed!"

"M. le Comte," I said as calmly as I could, for the blood was beginning to sing in my ears, "permit me to tell my story. Three nights ago a stranger rode up to Marsan. He bore the message which I have just repeated. My father, who recognized the messenger by some secret sign which I know nothing of, ordered out his horse at once that he himself might bring it to Montauban. But my father is growing old, as you know, Monsieur; besides, in cold, wet weather his wounds trouble him greatly. I begged that I might come in his



stead. I was eager to be of service to our master—to prove to him my loyalty and address. At last my father yielded. I should have his horse. The stranger gave me the paper sealed. He repeated to me its contents—three, four times, until I knew them word for word. Then he sprang to horse and disappeared in the night. Five minutes later I was on the road to Montauban. By noon of the next day I had reached the Losse, and here I was compelled to stop to rest my horse. Evening saw me en route again. At midnight I reached Comdan; dawn found me at Lestoure. An hour's rest, and we pressed on. At noon we had reached the Garonne. We forded it, and I thought soon to reach Montauban, when, of a sudden, my horse fell lame. He grew worse at every step, until he was no longer able to proceed. There was no house in sight, so I left him by the roadside and hastened on afoot. As evening came I entered Montauban from the west."

I paused a moment at what I had yet to tell.

"Yes, yes!" cried my listener. "Continue, Monsieur; and then?"

"And then, M. le Comte," I said, "as I was hastening along the Rue Gogard a woman burst from a gate and appealed to me for help. Without pausing to reflect, I followed her. The rest you know."

He sat for a moment looking at me.

"In faith, Monsieur," he said at last, "if what you say is true,—and it hath a certain ring of truth about it,—you are not so greatly at fault as I had thought. I reprieve you from the gallows till I have tested your story. M. de Fronsac," he added, to a young man who stood near by, "I commit M. de Marsan to your care. See that he does not escape."

Fronsac bowed and took his place at my side.

"See that he is provided with new equipage," added M. le Comte, with a gleam of humor in his eye as he looked at me; "he hath need of it." And then he rose from his seat and his voice took a sterner ring. "Messieurs," he cried, "you have heard this message, and can guess how nearly it touches us. Whether it be true or false, we will soon determine. Arm yourselves!"

D'Aurilly, leaning on his chair, interrupted him.

"Do you mean, M. le Comte," he asked disdainfully, "that you intend to set out on this fool's errand?"

My master shot him a swift glance, in which I saw suspicion spring to life.

"It may be, as you say, a fool's errand, M. le Vicomte," he answered. "Should it prove so, this liar will lose his head. But should it appear that he spoke truth,"—he paused, his eyes still on d'Aurilly,—"should it appear that he spoke truth, it will not be his head that falls. In either case, a spy and traitor will get his dues."

D'Aurilly's eyes were on the floor, but he kept countenance well.

"I am quite ready for the test, M. le Comte," he said quietly. "Nothing will delight me more than to see a traitor get his dues."

"Nor me," assented M. le Comte, and looked at him a moment longer. Then he turned again to his men with fire in his eyes. "Arm yourselves, Messieurs!" he cried. "In twenty minutes we must be en route to Cadillac. Should this dog of a Roquefort, who dares fight only women, have been there before us, we will follow him even to his den in the Pyrenees and drag him forth like the cur he is! A outrance!"

They heard him with gleaming eyes and mantling cheeks. I could hear their swords rattling, eager to leap from the sheath. The lust of blood was on them, and they caught up the cry as their master ended,—

"A outrance!"

Up and down the corridors it echoed as they rushed for the door, cheering, shouting, cursing. They bore the news along the hall and out into the court, whence, in a moment, again came the cry,—

"A outrance!"

And the good people of Montauban, hearing it, hurried to their homes and barred their doors, for they knew that the hounds of Cadillac were loose again.

#### IV.

##### I AM FORTUNATE IN FINDING A FRIEND

How it thrilled me—that cry echoing up and down the corridors! What would I not have given for the chance to ride forth, thigh to thigh with these lusty ruffians, to give and take good blows! Instead of that, here was I a prisoner—and at the thought my eyes turned to my companion.

He laughed as he caught my glance.

"Come, M. de Marsan," he said, "your face is an open book. You are longing to fare out with these blood-letters. You heard M. le Comte instruct me to secure you a new equipage. Besides, I doubt not you stand in need of meat and drink. So come,—for twenty minutes is not a long time."

His last words, spoken after a moment's teasing hesitation, brought the hot blood to my cheek.

"Twenty minutes!" I stammered. "We go also, then, Monsieur?"

"Assuredly," he laughed. "Come."

I followed him from the room blindly, unable to speak, trembling with excitement. What a chance! What fortune! I would show whether I or that cursed, hawk-faced d'Aurilly was to be believed! It made my blood boil to think of his cool insolence,—his black treachery,—for in my heart of hearts I was certain that it was he who had stolen my letter—but to prove it, there was the problem!

Down the stair we went to a great room piled with arms, where a

mob of crazy men were already choosing what they needed. With great joy I found my own sword among a pile of others,—its leathern scabbard did not proclaim the Toledo within, thank Heaven!—and in five minutes was armed with pistolets and poniard, clothed in a very handsome suit of black, with great boots, whose spurs clanked most merrily as I rattled down the stair behind my friend—for such, even in the few minutes I had known him, I was determined he should be.

"Now for food," he said, and I was not sorry to follow him into a room on the lower floor where there was a long table piled with meat and drink. "In faith, I have need of it myself," he added as he dropped into the seat at my right, but his appetite was far from keeping pace with mine.

As I ate I looked at him, and my heart warmed to his frank face and honest eyes. Young he still was,—not more than a year or two my senior,—but there was that in his air which proclaimed the soldier and man of affairs, accustomed to the smiles of fortune and quite ready to coerce her should she attempt to turn her face away. I had already realized my helplessness without a friend in this great house, and I blessed the chance that had thrown me into this man's keeping.

"Do you know, M. de Marsan," he said suddenly, "I was quite moved by that little tale of yours. I was certain that M. le Comte could not doubt it."

"Thank you, Monsieur," I answered. "I mean to prove that it was true."

"And I am sure you will succeed," he said heartily. "But, my faith, how unfortunate it was that you should happen along the Rue Gogard just when you did! A moment earlier or later, and M. le Comte would perhaps be in position to bring the Duc de Roquefort to his knees. Small wonder he was vexed at you—more especially since he received that hideous scar across the face, which will stay with him always."

"I regret that I was such a marplot," I said, "but I could not well do other than I did. When a woman asks for aid——"

"And a young and pretty woman, was she not, Marsan?" asked my companion, smiling at me broadly.

"Yes," I admitted, "young and pretty. Do you know her, Monsieur?"

He smiled more broadly still.

"I think I can guess. Did you not hear her name?"

"The man who was with her called her Claire."

He nodded.

"That is she. Small wonder you leaped to follow her! Claire de Brissac, but six months out of the good sisters' keeping, yet already the toast of the whole valley of the Garonne. It has never been my

good fortune to meet her, but such tales as we have heard! 'Tis said Roquefort himself is mad about her, and a month since Rumor had them wedded, but at the last the affair hung fire—through some caprice on her part, 'tis said. She would do well to wed him while she can," he added. "He may not choose to call a priest the second time."

"But her father," I said, "her uncle—will not they protect her?"

Fronsac laughed.

"Her uncle—pouf! He is nothing—a man of words—a man of some wit perhaps, but a man who cleans Roquefort's shoes. He has no spirit, not even enough to compel the girl's obedience, else had she been Madame la Duchesse long ere this. Her father was a man, though, —Sieur de Brissac,—perhaps you have heard of him? He stood upright at Roquefort's side, eye to eye, and his daughter is worthy of him.

"It behooves Roquefort to marry," continued Fronsac after a moment. "He has no issue. His next of kin is a cousin—a Spaniard whom he hates. He hath been married once, a virago from Valladolid, where his cousin also dwells. She made his life a burden, 'tis said, and with it all gave him no children. 'Twas more than man could bear. One morning she was found dead at the cliff-foot—an ugly story."

I understood now why Brissac's face had hardened when he had scented a romance in the air. He destined the girl for other things.

"But what was Brissac's business here?" I asked at length.

"There are strange rumors afoot, Marsan," and my companion lowered his voice and glanced about to see that no one else could hear. "It is said that Roquefort, who, living there in the Pyrenees, is already more than half Spanish, is trying to persuade the towns of the Midi to revolt against the King and aid an army of invasion which Spain will provide. Brissac, it is said, came to Montauban to spread the intrigue here, where there is already a very pretty nest of malcontents. Fortunately, M. le Comte has a friend in Roquefort's household—as you should know, since you brought a message from him—and learned of Brissac's mission. This mission, you understand, this plan of Roquefort's, is all in the air—there is no proof of it; but M. le Comte believed there were in Brissac's possession certain papers which would give all the proof needed. So he determined to corner Brissac, examine his papers, and if he found the ones he sought, lay them before the King. Besides, M. le Comte could kill two birds with one stone—he would do his King a signal service, and by the same stroke be rid forever of his enemy. But it was a matter which required finesse—so he determined himself to execute the clever little coup which you spoiled yestereve."

"Yes, yes," I said, understanding for the first time, and fell a moment silent, turning over this bit of news. "Monsieur," I asked, "what is the cause of the feud between the houses of Cadillac and Roquefort?"

Fronsac shrugged his shoulders.

"I do not know," he answered. "It hath been in the blood for a century. It started, I have heard, in some absurd question of precedence. It is the old story of the frog and the mouse who found it impossible to dwell in peace together. If Roquefort hath sacked Cadillac, there will be some merry work ere we return to Montauban."

I smiled, for this was my first taste of battle, and it pleased me mightily. Besides, I had not only to win my spurs, but to prove also to M. le Comte that I was no liar.

"Monsieur," I said, "permit me to assure you that you will have no cause to watch me. I am too anxious to see this expedition through. My honor is at stake, and I mean to prove that it is not I but another who is the traitor. But tell me something of the Vicomte d'Aurilly. How comes he in this household?"

I could feel my companion's eyes searching my face, but I did not meet his gaze, fearing that he might read my thought.

"The Vicomte d'Aurilly," he said quietly at last, "belongs to one of the oldest families of the Basses Pyrenees. Unhappily, the fortunes of his house have declined greatly, but this hath not lessened his pride, as you may have perceived. He is in this household because he is a suitor for the hand of Mademoiselle Valérie, daughter of M. le Comte."

For a moment I saw my theory falling into bits. If d'Aurilly were a suitor for Mademoiselle, why should he betray her into Roquefort's hands?

"Only," added my companion, in a lower tone and with a certain look that drew from me a second glance, "I believe he is an unsuccessful suitor. It is said that M. le Comte had the goodness to consult his daughter in the matter and that she would have none of it."

Well, that was different—that gave me the key to d'Aurilly's motive! There was a tone in my companion's voice which drew my eyes again to his face—he was staring at the table before him distraught, seeing nothing. It seemed to me that I could read his secret, and of a sudden I determined to tell him my theory. I glanced around and saw that the room was almost empty.

"M. de Fronsac," I began, "for what I am about to tell you I have no proof, yet I believe myself not far beside the mark. And first let me assure you on my honor that I am what I claim to be, Paul de Marsan, liege to M. le Comte, and that I brought a message to him. That message was stolen from me, as you have heard. I believe, Monsieur, that d'Aurilly was the thief."

My companion started round upon me, all his blood in his face.

"I believe, furthermore," I added, "that it was d'Aurilly who informed Roquefort of the defenceless condition of Cadillac. Perhaps



he hath determined that if he cannot get Mademoiselle in one way, he will get her in another."

Fronsac sat for a moment looking at me, his eyes dark, his brows knitted.

"Soul of God!" he breathed at last. "If you should be right! How M. le Comte's wrath would search him out and consume him! Yet, if he succeed, he will have Mademoiselle Valérie for hostage—he could dictate terms. What a plot—the more one thinks of it, the prettier it becomes!" Then he turned to me suddenly. "M. de Marsan," he said impetuously, "we must be friends. We two, alone, must set about the unveiling of this scoundrel."

He held out his hand, and I grasped it warmly.

"Nothing would please me more, Monsieur," I said with a great lightening of the heart. "I covet you for a friend."

"And I you."

He looked into my eyes for a moment, and I read truth and manhood there. So it was settled.

I could see that he was in a fever of impatience to be off, and just as I pushed my platter from me the call to horse sounded from without. We hurried down into the court, where there was a great tangle of men and beasts. Through this we pushed, my companion leading the way, to the place where our horses, which he had ordered from the stables, awaited us. My mount was a great, mettlesome sorrel, and I looked him over with exultation, for we had none such in our stable at Marsan.

A moment later M. le Comte himself strode down the steps into the court, his face still bandaged, and gave the signal to mount. We sprang to saddle on the instant, and it was wonderful to see how that mob resolved itself into a little army. Out through the gate we swung, three hundred strong, the standards—azure; on a bend or a laurel tree sinople—floating gayly in front.

The great gate clanged shut behind us, and I saw that even a small garrison could hold the place, so admirably was it fitted for defence. The sun was shining from a sky unclouded, and we made a brave show as we clattered through the narrow streets of the town, the crowd looking on from either side. Some of them cheered, but the most were silent and gazed at us with no friendly eyes, and I saw that even in Montauban M. le Comte's couch was not an easy one. At last we were out in the open country and struck into a gait which soon left the walls far behind.

I glanced back for a last look at the town, and saw M. le Comte riding moodily along near the rear of the column. To his left rode *Sieur Letourge*, to his right *d'Aurilly*.



## V.

## THE RIDE TO CADILLAC

M. LE COMTE's château of Cadillac stood upon the east bank of the Garonne, some ten leagues to the south of Montauban. My father had taken me thither once, when I was a mere boy,—what business called him there I do not know,—and I remembered quite clearly the great house, with its high, graceful central tower, its broad wings, and the pretty park in front, sloping sweetly down to the river's edge. It beseeemed me at the time that the palace of the King of France must be less beautiful; but, alas, one's eyes grow more critical with age!

Our road for a time lay through the wide valley of the river, and as we swung onward I sat erect in the saddle and drank in great draughts of the cool air—so sweet, so pure, such as one finds only here in Gascony. It was good to be alive, in such gallant company, with prospect of hard blows and, perchance, glory at the end. I stole a glance at Fronsac, not doubting that he shared my exultation, and was astonished to see him riding with rein loose and head bent and eye lack-lustre. He surprised my glance and smiled as he looked at me.

"The question, my friend," he said, "is, shall we be in time?"

I did not answer. I confess I did not wish the adventure to end so speedily and tamely. Besides, I had a great desire to see for myself the Duc de Roquefort's stronghold in the Pyrenees, for I had heard it was well worth seeing.

"When was it you left Marsan?" he asked after a moment.

"At midnight on the twenty-fourth."

"And this is the twenty-seventh. On the morning of the twenty-fifth, doubtless, the Duc de Roquefort left his seat at Marleon and started for M. le Comte's château. By pushing his horses he might have reached Tarbes that night. By evening of yesterday he should have been at Aurignac, and he may get to the château by noon to-day. If he hath carried out this programme, we shall be too late."

"But, Monsieur," I protested, "it may be that he did not set out from Marleon until the twenty-sixth, or some accident may have happened to delay him. Besides, he could not have gone by the direct route, since he was penetrating M. le Comte's country. It is only by great diligence that he could reach the château to-day."

"True," assented my companion gloomily, "yet the Duc de Roquefort is always diligent—else he would not have dared undertake this expedition. He is a great gambler, ready to stake his head on the turn of a card. Some day he will lose, but it seems this time that he must win."

"Grant that he does reach the château at noon to-day," I said, "still, even with only thirty men, Madame la Comtesse should be able

to hold out against him for some hours—and five or six hours are all that we shall need.”

“True,” and my companion nodded again, “Madame is not the woman to yield the château without a struggle. But what if she be surprised, if she be not expecting an assault, if the gates be open—what then, Monsieur?”

“Then,” I cried boldly, “we will spur after them, even to their castle in the Pyrenees! M. le Comte himself hath said it!”

But Fronsac shook his head.

“You have never visited Marleon, have you, M. de Marsan?” he asked.

“No, Monsieur, I have never been farther south than Lembeye.”

“The castle of M. de Roquefort stands on a height above the town, and is approached only by a single, narrow road, where two men can scarcely walk abreast. The Duc du Poitiers, with an army of three thousand men, once assaulted it in vain. It will not soon yield to force.”

“If not to force, then to stratagem!” I cried.

“Quite right,” chuckled a low voice behind us. “If not to force, then to stratagem. Well said!”

I turned with a start to see that it was the *Sieur Letourge*, who had ridden close to us without our perceiving it, and who had overheard my last words.

“M. de Fronsac,” he continued, bowing, and urging his horse nose to nose with mine, “M. le Comte wishes to speak with you. Do you fall back and join him. I will endeavor to entertain our friend here,” and he nodded to me.

Fronsac obeyed without a word, and for some moments my new companion and I rode side by side in silence. I glanced at him narrowly from time to time, for this was the first that I had seen him in the light of day and close at hand. A tall, raw-boned man, whose hair was turning gray, and whose stern face, with its arched nose, deep-set eyes, firm mouth, and aggressive chin, told of the will which knew not how to accept defeat. Not a pleasant face, perhaps, yet a strong one, an honest one, and one which drew my eyes to it with a kind of fascination. This was the man, as I well knew, who for some score of years had been the right hand of M. le Comte, who had done more than any other to confirm his rule from Rieux to Montauban, and to impress his neighbors, the Duc de Roquefort among the number, with a hearty respect for his heavy fist—his heavy fist, that is, the two or three hundred reckless rogues whom he held in leash and let loose from time to time to punish some contumacious lordling or frighten into subjection a rebellious peasantry. Ah, how the peasants hated him,—this man, *Letourge*,—who had pulled himself up from among

them by sheer strength of will and straightway forgot his kinship with them! He could not serve two masters, so he served M. le Comte, and served him well.

He caught my glance, and smiled grimly as he looked into my eyes.

"You were talking of storming Roquefort's castle at Marleon?" he asked.

"Yes, Monsieur."

"'Twill be no easy task."

"But it may not be needful. We may reach the château in time."

He shook his head, as Fronsac had done.

"Had we set out last night," he said. "Had we permitted you to deliver your message straightway! I can see now that I played the fool. Yet the sight of you there in M. le Comte's antechamber took my wits away. You spoke a true word, M. de Marsan, when you told me I should regret my wrath."

I looked at him eagerly.

"Then you too believe my story, M. Letourge?" I asked quickly.

He gave me one look from under his eyebrows.

"Surely," he answered. "Babes scarce out of leading-strings do not invent lies so glibly. They seem ready, though, to run to the aid of the first woman they hear squawking!"

I flushed at his tone, but checked the retort which sprang to my lips. After all, I had doubtless much to learn.

"But though we may not reach Cadillac in time, we may yet win the race," he added. "You have noted, perhaps, that we are saving the horses. Should we push forward at full speed to Cadillac, that would be the end—we could go no farther. As it is, we are starting on a long journey, and Roquefort may be hard put to it ere he gets back again behind his battlements at Marleon."

He fell silent again, looking so stern and inflexible that I had not the heart to address him. Yet it seemed to me that M. le Comte was in error. Even if the whole force were not sent forward, it would be wise, I thought, to send a small party at full speed to attempt to warn Madame. But this was my first campaign, so why should I venture to advise?

At last I heard the gallop of a horse's feet behind us, and Fronsac rode up, his eyes agleam with excitement.

"Such fortune!" he cried, as he pulled up his horse beside mine. "Do you know to what M. le Comte has consented, my friend? It is that you and I shall ride on together, full speed, to Cadillac."

It was my thought—so I was not a fool, after all!

"You forget," interrupted Letourge drily, "that M. de Marsan is a prisoner."

"And in my charge," said Fronsac proudly. "M. le Comte entrusts him to me. I will answer for him."

"Thank you, Monsieur," I said, my face aglow with pleasure. "I shall not forget your kindness. When do we set out?"

"At once!" cried Fronsac, and clapped spur to flank.

With a last glance at Letourge, who was looking at us with amused eyes, I sped after him, and in a moment we were past the troop, with only the open road before us. Neck and neck we went for half an hour or more, my heart bounding at the rapid motion, and then we drew rein to give our mounts a breathing-spell.

"What a chance!" cried my companion, lifting his hat and wiping the sweat from his brow. "Do you know, Marsan, there is an adventure before us? I believe we shall reach the château ahead of Roquefort and his rascals!"

"I trust so," I said. "It would be a privilege to be in time to warn Madame."

"And Mademoiselle," he added.

"Of course, and Mademoiselle," I assented, smiling to myself.

"Then come!" he cried, "spur on again!"

And spur on again we did, under the trees of the river road, down to the ford and across, then straight over-country as the river bent away westward, the peasants' huts flying past us and the workers in the fields straightening themselves with cracking joints to get a glimpse of us. An hour of this riding, and we were back at the river's bank, where we stopped to wind and water our horses. Then across the river again, with Muret on our left, and only two leagues to go. But noon was long since past, and I saw Fronsac, with anxious eyes, mark the declining sun. Still on and on we went, and I could feel my mount trembling between my knees. Plainly there was no question here of sparing horses.

"Around that bend, up the hill beyond, and we are there!" cried my companion at last. "Look to your pistols!"

I drew them from their holsters, one after the other, and assured myself that they were primed and ready for service.

In a moment we were around the bend of the road, and before us lay a long, gentle slope. Up this we spurred, and there beneath us in the valley stood the château, peaceful and smiling under the bright sun of the Midi. I could see half a dozen lacqueys lolling about the great gate. But it was not at them I looked. It was at a gleam of arms and warlike equipage which was just topping the opposite slope, and my heart leaped, for I knew that it must be the force of Roquefort.

There was a thrill in that moment worth a year of life. How my blood sang!

But no pausing there! Again the spur, and down the slope we

rushed, our mounts responding gamely with a last burst of speed. Roquefort's men must have seen us in the same instant and understood our mission, for they came tearing down the other slope to head us off. The cries, the beat of horses' hoofs, the rattle of arms, reached to the château. At a glance, I saw the lacqueys laboring at the great gates—we should be in time—the château was safe—we would win the race!

Then, of a sudden, came a shrill, frenzied cry from my companion, and he jerked his horse about and galloped full course towards the river. For an instant I thought him seized with sudden madness, but as my eyes followed him I saw a sight which made my heart stand still.

Almost on the river bank an arbor had been built, and at its door a girl was standing. I saw at a glance her beauty and the richness of her dress. It must be Mademoiselle—it could be no other! In a flash I too had pulled my horse around and galloped after my companion. Thank God, there was not far to go!

"This way, this way, Valérie!" cried Fronsac, standing up in his stirrups, frenzied with excitement.

She stood for an instant confused, uncertain, looking at him. Then she sped towards him, her face alight.

I thought for a breath that he must ride her down, but he jerked his horse back upon its haunches, leaned down, and swung her to the saddle before him. She threw her arms about him and laid her head upon his breast. I felt my eyes grow wet with sudden tears as I saw the tenderness of that gesture.

It seemed given in the face of death, for down the slope at us thundered Roquefort's rascals. There was no escape—yet a man must not die unavenged, and I snatched my pistols out and fired at the leaders. I saw one of them grimace in agony; down he came, headlong; a horse stumbled and fell, throwing another off its feet. I tried to pull my mount aside, but in an instant the flood of cursing men and tangled, kicking horses had overwhelmed me and borne me down, then caught me up again and hurled me down the hill. I caught a glimpse of my companion standing at bay, his back to the river, his fair burden still in his arms, still gazing up into his face—what an instant for a man to die! Then the flood was over me again and crushed the light away.

## VI.

### I TASTE OF ROQUEFORT'S TEMPER

"AGAIN!" cried a rude voice, and some unseen power plucked me up and thrust me under water. It was icy cold, and I felt dimly, without caring greatly, that I was suffocating. Then I was drawn forth again—ah, how sweet the good air was! I drew a long breath and opened my eyes.

The river was flowing at my feet. A sturdy knave supported me on either side and looked questioningly at a man who stood two paces off. It was they who had plunged me under water. Hot with rage, I tried to shake them off, but they held me as though I were a child.

"That is better!" cried the man. "He seems to have come to his senses. Stand him against that tree."

They led me to the tree he pointed out and stood me up against it. I wiped the water from my eyes and looked about me again. This time I understood. I was a prisoner, and the man directing the affair was no doubt the Duc de Roquefort. He came close to me where I stood, still trembling with exhaustion.

"I presume you see the desperate nature of your case," he said coolly, his deep-set eyes glittering full into mine. He had a swarthy face, not uncomely, though lined with passion, and his eyes were like a basilisk's. "You will see it still more clearly when I assure you that there is only one possible way for you to save your life—that is by answering truthfully all my questions."

He paused a moment as though to permit his words to sink deep into my consciousness. There was need that I should think quickly. I glanced towards the château and saw that the gates were closed and the tower manned. I looked at Roquefort's troops, dismounted, lolling in the edge of the wood along the river, waiting his pleasure. One group, however, was still under arms, and my pulse leaped as I saw they were on guard with Fronsac and Mademoiselle in their midst. If by some lie I could hold Roquefort here for two hours or even less, M. le Comte might yet be in time for rescue. I felt my captor's eyes on mine and turned away for fear he would read my thought.

"You understand?" he asked, after a moment.

I nodded.

"And you agree?"

"Proceed, Monsieur," I said.

"You were with Cadillac?" he asked.

"At Montauban—yes, Monsieur."

"Come, no lies. He is near by."

"No nearer than Montauban, Monsieur."

He glared at me for a moment, but my strength had come back to me, and this time I could meet his eyes without shrinking.

"Then what do you and Fronsac here?" he demanded.

"My friend carries a message to Madame," I answered readily, glad to find an answer that was near the truth. "He chose me to ride hither with him."

He looked at me yet a moment, then turned away and gazed towards the château, twisting his mustaches and muttering to himself.



"If I had proof—if I had proof—there would yet be time to capture the woman too and send this pretty place up in smoke!"

He turned again to me with those snake's eyes of his agleam.

"Is this true?" he demanded between his teeth. "Tell me again, is this true? Think well before you answer. A lie will cost you such hours of agony as you have never dreamed of."

"There is M. de Fronsac," I suggested. "Ask him also."

He laughed harshly.

"M. de Fronsac prefers to hold his tongue," he said. "Think you I should have troubled to bring you back to life otherwise. Answer me. Is this true?"

"It is true," I repeated.

"Very good. I am going to believe you. But if I find you have betrayed me——" A look finished the sentence, which needed no other ending.

I did not flinch under his gaze. Could I but keep him there until M. le Comte laid hold of him I need care little for his threats.

He hurried away from me and was soon preparing for the attack in a manner which bespoke his skill in warfare. Four men were sent across the valley to the heights beyond to watch the road by which Fronsac and I had come, and so guard against surprise. A hundred men were massed opposite the great gate of the château, and two parties of perhaps fifty passed out of sight behind either wing. A moment later an order came to the men who were guarding me, and I was led towards the group that stood about the other prisoners.

I saw Fronsac looking towards me with joyful face, and then he stooped and whispered a few words into the ear of Mademoiselle. What they were I could only guess, but she arose from the log on which she had been sitting and turned her bright face towards me. Then, for the first time, I caught the full power of her beauty, and as I looked I did not wonder that d'Aurilly should turn traitor or Fronsac risk his life for her, since in their hearts there was no other face like that which lived in mine.

"So you still live, Marsan!" cried my friend, as the group parted to let me through. "But I am glad!" and he came towards me, holding out his hands.

My heart warmed to him anew as I hastened forward to grasp them, but one of the guards stepped in between.

"No talking!" he said gruffly. "It is M. le Duc's order."

I felt my cheek crimson at his insolence, and for an instant my hands itched to be at his throat, but I caught Fronsac's eyes fixed on me warningly, and realized that no good could come of violence. So we sat down with Roquefort's man between us and watched the attack on the château with feelings I need not describe.

Events had gone forward there even in the few minutes my attention had been drawn away. The force at the main gate had armed themselves with a great log, and even as we turned towards them a pistol-shot gave the signal which put it in motion. At the same instant a great uproar arose behind the château, proving that the attack had begun there also. The men with the log moved slowly at first, but faster and faster as they gathered momentum. As they neared the gate a dozen muskets were fired from the battlement, and some few of Roquefort's men fell, but the forward rush did not pause nor waver. Plainly the garrison of the château was too small to make effective resistance, and my heart fell within me. What if I had done wrong in keeping Roquefort here? What if M. le Comte should, after all, arrive too late? You can guess the agony of the thought!

On and on swept the rush, and the log was hurled against the gate with a tremendous crash. In a moment it was caught up again like a wisp of straw, borne backward, and hurled forward. I saw a group of the assailants linger at the gate, then suddenly scurry away from it. There came a flash of flame, a roar, and a great cloud of smoke whirled skyward.

"A petard!" cried Fronsac. "They have fired a petard!"

As the smoke passed, we saw that one of the gates had been blown inward, but the other still hung by its bars. With a cheer, the assailants rushed forward. It was over then! I had lost M. le Comte his wife and his château! Now, indeed, would he have cause to hate me!

But of a sudden the four sentries burst out of the wood at the hill-crest like men possessed and scoured down into the valley. I saw Roquefort exchange a hurried word with them, give a quick order, then spur towards us, and as he neared us I marked how rage distorted his face and made it hideous.

"Bring up a dozen horses—the freshest!" he cried to the guard, and as the men hastened away he turned to me. "Monsieur," he said in a voice that chilled me, "I warned you of your fate should you betray me, but it seems you did not heed the warning. You counted, perhaps, on a rescue. But you will never see Cadillac again,—oh, how I shall pay you for this!"

His eyes were glaring into mine, bloodshot, venomous, and I confess that at the bottom of my soul I feared him. Yet still I managed to achieve a smile.

"We shall see, M. le Duc," I said.

He seemed choked with rage and answered only by an angry gesture of the arm which hastened up the horses. In a moment Fronsac and I were bound to two of them and Mademoiselle strapped to a pillion behind a brawny soldier. I was hot with rage at the roughness with which they treated her, and I saw Fronsac straining at his bonds, his

face livid. But in a breath we were off, the three of us with our little escort, at first under the trees along the river, then up the slope beyond. As we reached the crest, I looked back and saw Roquefort marshalling his forces at the edge of the wood to cover our retreat, and beyond, along the road, I fancied I caught a glimpse of M. le Comte's troops, but we were deep among the trees again before I could make sure.

Down the hill we went at a pace which, tied to the saddle as I was, seemed doubly foolhardy. Plainly our escort had their orders, and feared death less than the displeasure of their master. Evening was at hand, and under the great trees it was soon so dark that the man before me, leading my horse, seemed but a shadow. Yet they appeared well acquainted with the ground, and there was not a moment's slackening of our speed.

At last we emerged from the forest into a rough road, and for a moment the brightness seemed almost that of noonday, so great was the contrast with the gloom of the woods. A wide and fertile plain lay before us, and away to the south I could see a range of mountains faintly outlined against the sky, and I knew they were the Pyrenees.

The road led us eastward along a river, which I guessed was the Saye. But though the land seemed fertile and promising, there were few houses—only a narrow peasant's hut here and there, more squalid than any I had ever seen in our good Marsan country. So when, presently, there appeared ahead, standing just at the edge of the road, a building of more than usual size, I looked at it with no little interest. As we neared it I saw standing before the door two horses with women's equipage, and of a sudden the leader of our troop put his fingers to his mouth and blew a shrill blast.

Almost on the instant the door opened and two women came out, attended by a little, fat man, evidently the keeper of the house. They stood looking at us for a moment, then turned to mount their horses. There seemed something strangely familiar about one of the figures. As she stood, I could not see her face, for she wore a hood pulled over her head and a cloak wrapped about her to protect her from the cold—then, with a start, I recognized the cloak. It was mine—the one I had dropped in the hallway of the house in the Rue Gogard. And with fast-beating heart I knew that it was Claire who wore it!

Some exclamation must have escaped me, for the fellow at my right asked me roughly what ailed me. I did not answer, and we rode on in silence. In a moment we had pulled up before the house, and our leader rode ahead to exchange a word with the women. Then he came back again and ordered forward the horse on which Mademoiselle was mounted. She was unstrapped and assisted to alight, then led into the inn, doubtless for refreshment.

But I was not thinking of her, I was watching Claire—the poise of

her figure, her superb grace in the saddle. Slowly she reined her horse around until she faced us, and I saw her examining the members of the troop. With feverish lips I watched her eyes as they went from face to face—and in a moment I was looking straight into them, with blood bounding to my temples.

For a breath she held me so, then turned her eyes away, slowly, indifferently, without a sign that she had known me!

And of a sudden I found myself shivering with cold, and remembered, for the first time that afternoon, that my clothing was still dripping with the water of the river.

## VII.

### A VISION IN THE NIGHT

DIMLY I saw Mademoiselle come out again into the road and mount a horse that had been provided for her. Fronsac and I were unbound, though not entrusted with our horses' bridles, and we set forward at a more leisurely pace than had marked the first stage of the journey. Plainly there was no longer immediate fear of pursuit, and our guard relaxed somewhat, breaking now and again into a snatch of song or shouting a rude joke back and forth. I saw that our retreat was being made on some well-matured plan, and my heart sank as I realized how remote was chance of rescue.

The man at my right, who seemed to regard me with some small trace of kindness, perceiving my blue nose and chattering teeth, gave me his cloak, and this wrapped around me rendered the journey somewhat less of torture. But nothing could drive away the chill which had settled about my heart when I had looked into Claire's eyes and caught no answering gleam of friendship and interest in them. I did not see her again, for she kept to the rear of the column with the other women, and I held my face turned resolutely to the front, for even a cadet of Gascony has his pride.

Night found us near Aurignac, as I gathered from the talk of my guards, for the country was quite unknown to me, but we left the village far on the left and pressed on through the darkness for an hour longer. It seemed to me, from the uneven nature of the ground, that we must have left the road, and I was about to ask whither we were bound when the command came to halt.

I could distinguish absolutely nothing in the darkness, but my guards appeared to know the place well, and one of them, dismounting, led my horse slowly forward across what seemed to be a bridge. I caught a gleam of light ahead, and in a moment we turned a corner and I could see something of my surroundings.

We were in the inner bailey of a castle, once of no little strength, but fallen quite into decay, for the curtains were cracked and ragged

and broken, and two of the corner towers had toppled over. The donjon loomed up into the darkness at one end, and alone seemed to have defied the hand of time and the despoiler.

Towards this we rode, and at the door my captors leaped from the saddle and helped me to dismount. I should have fallen had they not supported me, for my joints had lost the power of motion, but they led me to a corner where a fire had just been started, and set me with my back against the wall.

In a moment I saw them leading Fronsac in, and they set him down opposite me, one of the men taking the precaution to stand guard between. Presently the women passed, and I saw Mademoiselle smile at my companion—a smile which brought the glad blood to his cheek and in which there was life and hope. The others did not even glance in our direction, though I watched them till they had disappeared into an inner room.

But a woman's coldness could not rob me of the grateful warmth of the fire. How good it felt! My clothing was soon steaming in the heat, and I struggled to my feet and turned slowly about before the blaze in order to dry myself more thoroughly. I felt better with every minute, save for a great and growing emptiness within, for I had eaten nothing since my hasty breakfast with Fronsac at Montauban.

It was perhaps half an hour before one of the men came back to us and ordered us to follow him. He led the way to the right through a doorway into a lofty room, which, shattered and time-stained as it was, retained still some traces of its former beauty. At one end was the great fireplace, and in this a fire had been kindled and two men were busily engaged preparing food. A lamb had been bought or stolen somewhere, stripped deftly of its hide, dismembered, and set to roast before the fire, and most savory and inviting did it smell. A pile of bread, nearer black than white, was heaped upon a table, and to this we were led and told to take what we wanted. A dripping piece of meat was added, and we sat down again in our warm corners to enjoy it. Even now it makes my mouth run to think of that meal and how good it tasted.

I could see that Fronsac relished it too, though the blood in his cheek may have come from happiness. The guard still watched between us to prevent our talking, while the others sat before the fire, crunching their bread and meat. A sorry-looking lot they were, gathered, doubtless, from the banditti who infested the mountains—Spaniards most of them, swarthy and dirty, with countenances where one might search in vain for a trace of kindness. Yet sitting there I caught a glimpse of the joy they got from life—a hard day's march or stirring fight, and then, after it, a snug seat close before a good fire, with bread and meat, and, oh! such hunger to relish it!



The women I saw nothing of, and I thanked fortune that they had a place apart in which to pass the night. But it was evidently here that we were to sleep, for some of the men had already rolled themselves in their cloaks and lay down against the wall, a saddle for a pillow, prepared to spend the night with what comfort they could. Not one of them, except the guard between us, seemed to give us the slightest thought, and for the first time since I had awakened with the water of the river in my ears the thought of escape came to me. With only one man to deal with, it would not be a difficult thing, provided he could be silenced without awaking any of the others. At least, it was worth thinking over. I got slowly to my feet, stretched my arms, and yawned. Then I took a step towards the door, but the sentry stopped me.

"You will remain here, Monsieur," he said.

"But I am weary," I protested. "Where am I to spend the night?"

He grinned and pointed back at the corner.

"You will spend it there," he said. "But here comes Drouet, whose business it is to look after you."

As he spoke the fellow who had ridden at my right all evening entered, and with him another whom I remembered having seen with Fronsac. They came direct to us, spread their cloaks near the fire, and Drouet motioned me to seat myself on his.

"As I am responsible for your continuance with us, Monsieur," he said, sitting down beside me, "we must take a few precautions."

"Very well," I said. "Do whatever you think needful."

Without more words he produced some pieces of rope. With one of these he bound my right ankle to his left one, and then the guard came forward and bound our wrists together.

"I think that will do," he said. "I advise you not to endeavor to get them loose, Monsieur, for I sleep lightly. Besides, M. le Duc cautioned me not to hesitate to kill you should you attempt escape."

"I shall attempt to do nothing but go to sleep," I answered, yawning, and we lay down together.

I saw that Fronsac watched all this keenly, and I knew that he too was thinking of flight. His guard sat down beside him, as mine had done.

"There are two courses open to you, Monsieur," he said. "Either give me your word of honor not to attempt to get away, or submit to the programme that has been carried out with your friend yonder. I must tie your hands and feet."

"But," Fronsac protested, "they have not tied the hands and feet of my friend."

The fellow stepped over and looked down to see how I was secured.



"No," he said, "but I am not a light sleeper, like Drouet there. I can't afford to take that chance. Come, Monsieur, choose."

For answer Fronsac held out his hands, and in a moment they were lashed together. Another rope was bound tightly about his ankles.

"There," grunted the fellow, as he secured the last knot. "Now, Monsieur, you may try to leave us if you wish. Only I warn you there are some sentries about who will not hesitate to fire," and rolling himself in his cloak, he was snoring in a moment.

Despite my fatigue, sleep did not come readily to my eyes. My brain was busy with thoughts of escape. I realized that once within Roquefort's stronghold at Marleon I should not find it easy to come out again, and I had no desire for that introduction to the rack which he had promised me. But to escape was no easy thing. I lay for long trying to devise some plan which offered at least a prospect of success. I might reach out with my free hand, grasp Drouet by the throat, and hold him so until he ceased to breathe. But I realized that, with one hand, it was most unlikely I could master so powerful a man, to say nothing of the noise such an encounter must create. A sudden blow was impossible for like reason. I tried softly to remove my hand from the knot which held it, but found that, too, impossible. I tried to reach the knot with my free hand, but Drouet stirred uneasily, and I lay still again. By the fading light of the fire I could dimly see Fronsac struggling to free himself, but with no more success than I. A sentry's step sounded at the door and a shadowy figure appeared there for a moment, looking over the room to see that all was well. Then he disappeared into the outer darkness, and for a time I watched the shadows dancing along the walls and over the ceiling. Gradually they grew faint and fainter, and fatigue weighed down my eyelids.

How long I slept I do not know, but I opened my eyes with a start and looked about the room. The fire had burned so low on the hearth that the place was almost in utter darkness, save for an instant, now and then, as a log fell asunder and sent a shower of sparks into the air. It was during one of these flashes that I fancied I saw a figure moving far down the room, but the light died away before I could make sure. I rubbed my eyes, braced my head against the wall, and waited. Yes, there it was again—this time there could be no mistaking—a cloaked figure bending over one man and then passing on to the next. What could it mean?

The light died out again, but in a moment I saw the figure once more, this time much nearer, and coming slowly down the line of sleeping men towards the corner where I lay. Nearer and nearer it came, until I felt a pair of eyes looking down into mine.

"M. de Marsan," breathed a voice, "you are awake? Close your eyes to show that you hear me."

I closed my eyes an instant, the blood rushing to my temples, my nerves a-quiver. I could not mistake that voice—no, not even its whisper!

"Can you get up?" asked the voice.

I shook my head and pointed with my free hand to my bound wrist and ankle.

In an instant the figure had dropped to its knees beside me. I felt swift fingers lightly examining the ropes, I caught the gleam of a knife, and my bonds fell from me.

"Now, follow me, Monsieur," whispered the voice.

For the moment I forgot everything but the joy of being with her—the joy of holding her hand again and whispering in her ear. I got cautiously to my knees, to my feet, and stole down the room after her. A shower of ashes threw the place into sudden light and sent my heart into my throat, but none of the sleepers stirred. She paused in the shadow of the farthest corner until I had reached her side.

"There, M. de Marsan," she whispered, "is a door through which, I think, you may escape. You see I am not ungrateful."

"Ungrateful!" I repeated, and caught her hand.

"You must go, Monsieur," she protested. "Even a moment may mean recapture."

"But I am going to risk that moment, Mademoiselle," I said. "You see that my words have proved true and that we have met again; only, this afternoon, I thought you had forgot me."

"Oh, no, M. de Marsan," she breathed, "I had not forgot you, nor am I like to do so. Only I knew I could not help you did anyone suspect me for your friend. But you must go—hasten!"

"And you?" I asked.

"Oh, I—I will return to the apartment where my maid and Mademoiselle de Cadillac are sleeping," and she made a little motion towards another door, almost hidden in the shadow.

There was a step at the door, and we saw the sentry enter and pause to glance about the room. For an instant I was certain he had seen us, so intently did he look towards the corner where we were, but at last he passed on again.

I felt that the hand I held in mine was trembling.

"You see the folly of delay, Monsieur," she panted. "You must go,—they must not retake you,—better to die fighting than to wait for death at Marleon! Ah, you do not know!" and she drew her hand from mine and pressed it for a moment to her eyes. How fair, how sweet she was! How I trembled to take her in my arms! "Adieu, Monsieur. My prayers go with you."

"And only your prayers, Mademoiselle?" I whispered, my heart on fire.

"Go, go!" she repeated, and held out her hand.

I caught it in both of mine and pressed it to my lips.

"Again I say, Mademoiselle, that this is not the last time," and I held tightly to the hand, which she would have drawn away. "I understand nothing of how you came to be awaiting us at the inn back yonder, but I know that it is fate which has thrown us together twice already. The third time we shall not part so quickly."

And again she shook her head as she had in the Rue Gogard.

"I have not your confidence in fate, Monsieur," she said. "Believe me, you must go. If you will not consider your own peril, think of mine."

True, I was a fool to have forgot it.

"Pardon," I said. "Forgive me for thinking only of myself."

I pressed my lips again to her soft, warm palm, and, not trusting myself to look at her, turned towards the door she had pointed out to me.

And then, in an instant, I remembered! I had not myself alone to consider—there were Mademoiselle and Fronsac who must be freed also! I could not leave them in this den of wolves—what a coward they would think me!

I turned back. None of the sleepers had stirred, nor seemed like to stir. Claire had disappeared into the inner room. I groped my way slowly across the floor. I could see Fronsac sitting against the wall. How his eyes brightened at sight of me coming back! He held his bound wrists towards me eagerly.

"I thought you gone," he whispered. "I was a fool! I might have known you would come back!"

His eyes were dark and moist with emotion—his voice trembled. What a thing it is to have a friend!

And then, of a sudden, there came the beat of horses' hoofs without, a sharp challenge; Drouet, awakened, rubbed his eyes sleepily, saw the severed cords, and leaped to his feet with a yell. I tried to rise to meet him, but he saw me on the instant, and with a bound like a panther's was upon me.

#### VIII.

#### MARLEON!

ONE man I might play even with, but not with the half dozen who sprang to Drouet's assistance, and at the end of a moment, seeing resistance useless, I lay still, cursing my ill-fortune. The struggle had awakened all the men, and they crowded about us, asking many questions.

"What is this?" cried a loud voice from the door. "Fighting among yourselves? God! But some head shall suffer!"

I recognized the voice and got slowly to my feet, as Roquefort strode

into the light cast by the fire. I looked at him in amazement, for his eyes were bloodshot, his face haggard, his clothing stained with mud. Plainly, M. le Comte had given him a warm argument, and he had been hard put to it to escape.

"It was no quarrel, M. le Duc," explained Drouet, "nothing but this fellow trying to escape."

"To escape!" cried Roquefort. "Do you tell me that you left a door for his escape, Drouet? You value that neck of yours but lightly, then?"

"I bound him to me hand and foot, Monsieur," said Drouet humbly. "You know I am not a heavy sleeper. How he got loose without awakening me I cannot imagine."

He went to the spot where we had lain and picked up the pieces of rope. A sharp cry escaped him as he looked at them.

"Well?" asked Roquefort angrily. "What new surprise?"

"See, Monsieur," cried Drouet, holding out the rope-ends. "He did not get loose of himself. Someone came, cut the ropes, and freed him."

For a moment Roquefort gazed at the ropes without speaking, but his face, when he raised it to mine, was terrible.

"A traitor!" he said. "A traitor here!" and he looked about him with eyes that sent a shiver through his men. "Oh, but someone shall pay for this! You shall tell us, Monsieur, who it was that cut your bonds and then you will have a companion on the rack. What a death! I could find it in my heart to pity you, Monsieur, if I did not hate you so!"

He stood yet a moment looking at me, then turned away, and I heard a murmur from the crowd at the door.

"To horse!" he cried. "Bind these two rogues to the saddle! Bring forth the women!"

In an instant all was confusion. Drouet and another led me away, out into the black court, through a crowd of sweating horses and cursing men-at-arms, to the place where our mounts were stabled. Again I was seated in the saddle, and a rope passed from ankle to ankle beneath the horse's belly. Drouet laughed savagely when it was ended.

"There, my brave," he said, "I'll warrant you'll stay with us yet a little longer."

I had not the heart to retort, but sat silent while the troop fell into line again. I strained my eyes through the darkness for a glimpse of Fronsac or the women, but saw no sign of either. At last came the word to march, and we set off slowly through the night. No road, this time, but what seemed rough hill-land, so slowly did we pick our way. Drouet was in a savage mood, reflecting, doubtless, that had I escaped

he must have suffered for it, and did what he could to make my position irksome by leading ~~me~~ mount over the roughest places and pricking him suddenly from time to time.

Dawn found us in a narrow valley with a little brook singing through. Far ahead I could see the peaks of the Pyrenees, nearer than the day before, but still leagues away. In the midst of a little grove of trees the word came to dismount, and the men swung themselves wearily from the saddle. It was easy to see that they had been hard pressed. Their horses were almost done; yes, and the stains upon their clothing were not wholly those of the road, for some carried their arms in slings, some had their heads bandaged, some clung to the saddle with convulsive fingers, their lips blue, their eyes set with suffering. So there had been a battle, and M. le Comte had won! I remembered his concern to keep his horses fresh and looked back over the way we had come in the wild hope that I might see him in pursuit, but I saw only the bleak hillsides, the barren rocks, the strip of woodland.

Yet Roquefort shared the same concern, for he stationed sentries on the neighboring hilltops and gave his men but a brief half-hour to prepare their meal and wind their horses. And here I caught a glimpse of the agony of a soldier's life—the wounded men groaning and cursing, the white fear of death upon them, their lips trembling in self-pity, receiving but scant attention, for the others were dead-weary from their long ride. One poor fellow came suddenly to the end, and was carried aside with little ceremony and a few rocks piled upon him. These scoundrels looked too often in the face of death to fear it until it came home to each one separately.

The half hour passed and we set forward again, only this time, in the light, I saw that Roquefort rode at the column's head with another man at his side. My eyes dwelt upon him idly and I wondered who this newcomer could be. He sat his horse well and was richly dressed—so richly that he seemed out of place in this bedraggled, road-stained mob. They were deep in talk, and at one moment Roquefort pointed away to the west. His companion turned his head to follow the gesture, and I caught his profile—there was no mistaking that arched nose, that low forehead, that cruel mouth—it was d'Aurilly!

I clutched my saddle to hold my seat, my emotion shook me so. Then he was the traitor, after all! And the plot, of which I had caught but a glimpse, lay before me like an open book. D'Aurilly was to have Mademoiselle; Fronsac could eat his heart out if he chose, or swallow his chagrin, if his gullet were big enough; with Mademoiselle for hostage, M. le Comte could be brought to terms; and as for me—

I would not think of it! Here was I still alive and with my wits to help me. Even at the worst there should be no tearing to pieces, no



death by inches. I would find an easier way than that. Yet I do not deny that for an instant I found it in my heart to regret the green fields of Marsan, to regret that I had not been content to remain there quietly and leave these great men to find other pawns to sacrifice. Yet, after all, this was life, this was living, and only the night before I had looked into a pair of eyes and fancied I saw love there. Was not that worth something?

What need to tell more of the journey? Day and night we pushed on, until our horses stumbled under us, over hill, through valley, avoiding the roads, seeking hidden ways, where M. le Comte would not think to follow. And always my guard was about me, until at last I came to see that Roquefort was taking no chance of losing me—no chance of missing his vengeance. The women were kept to the rear of the column; Fronsac I seldom saw; d'Aurilly passed me by with a sneering smile that turned me hot for murder. Well that I was young and strong, with a boy's hopeful heart, else had despair weighed me down!

'Tis true, Drouet relaxed a little as we journeyed forward and exchanged a word with me now and then, pointing out the features of the country through which we rode or telling some little story of his numberless campaigns with Roquefort. Gruesome stories they were, most of them, of murder, outrage, robbery, for Roquefort's men were not troubled by nice consciences and took, without questioning, all that came to their nets. Nor did their leader concern himself about them, so they went willingly on his business and fought his battles for him.

At noon of the third day we came to Marleon.

"You were asking about the castle," said Drouet suddenly. "Behold it."

I looked with all my eyes, but saw only the tumbled roofs of the little town.

"You look too low," he said. "Higher, on the cliff behind the town."

Then I descried it, and my heart grew cold as I looked at it. For two hundred feet or more the cliff sprang upward, straight as a house's wall and near as smooth—so smooth that no tree or shrub caught foothold on it. And just at the summit stood the castle, frowning down upon the village like some tireless, merciless watch-dog.

"But to get to it," I ventured, after a moment. "It seems to have been built only for the birds."

"You will see," and Drouet laughed meaningly. "I advise you to look well at the way, Monsieur; you may never have occasion to use it a second time."

I rode on without replying. What good to bandy words with this scoundrel? But as we drew nearer to the place my heart fell more and more. It might defy a king's army.



The road turned abruptly to the right of the town, and then in again behind a little spur of the mountain. Here the ascent began, and the way at once became so narrow that two horses could not go abreast. On either hand towered the crags, whence a dozen ambushed men might easily pick off a thousand. In and out the path wound and ever upward, until, at last, it stopped before a great gate, barred heavily with iron. I saw how adroitly the path was fashioned, so that not more than two men at a time could approach the gate. A horn sounded, our force was evidently scrutinized with care from within, and then the gate creaked back upon its hinges. In a moment we were in the court, and the word was given to dismount.

"Follow me, Monsieur," said Drouet, without giving me a moment to look about me or to exchange a glance with my friends. "We have an apartment awaiting you."

"I followed him silently, but my heart cleared somewhat when I saw him begin to mount a narrow stair. I had feared that I was to be buried in some dungeon underground,—anything were better than that,—to be shut away from the pure air and bright sunshine! So it was even with a certain cheerfulness that I went up the stair behind him. Up, up we went steadily, until at last I saw we had reached the stairhead. Drouet paused before a little door secured by a dozen bolts sunk deep into the masonry. He threw them back slowly, one by one, that I might contemplate their strength, then pulled the door open.

"Enter," he said, and I stooped and stepped within.

He stood looking after me a moment, then swung the door shut, and I heard him throwing the bolts into place with the same malicious deliberation. Then all was still.

I was in the topmost chamber of the tower looking towards the east—over the town and out across the plain. It was a little room, with walls of great stones there could be no removing, but there was a small window, too narrow, indeed, to permit the passage of my body, and barred with heavy iron, yet wide enough to admit a breath of fresh air and a stream of sunshine. I went to it and stood looking far out across the valley. The fields, the houses, the strip of woods along a little river were cameoed by the bright sunshine and the clear, pure air of the south. But my thoughts were heavy ones, and kept my eyes from perceiving the full beauty of the scene.

As I stood looking so, my eyes caught the movement of a body of men along a road afar off. I watched them listlessly at first, thinking them some body of peasants en route to a market or merrymaking, but as they drew nearer I saw that they were mounted, and then the sunlight was caught on glittering armor, on burnished hilts and gleaming spear-points. It was a troop of men armed cap-à-pie—and my heart leaped at the sudden thought that this might be M. le Comte himself—too late by an hour!

Breathlessly I watched them as they drew nearer—I could see that they numbered some three hundred, that they were well mounted and well accoutred. Some of the people of Marleon came out to look at them, and then, after a glance, went hastily in again, closing the gates behind them. I could see them running through the streets, and a noise of many voices floated upward to me, confused and indistinct. Plainly, there was something about this troop of horse which caused the good people of the town much uneasiness.

The troop came on slowly and with a certain impressiveness. Just at the city wall they stopped, and then there came mounting to my ears a trumpet's clear note of defiance. A pennant was thrown out upon the breeze,—it hung a moment limp, then the wind caught its folds and stretched it so that all might see—azure; on a bend or, a laurel-tree sinople,—the arms of Cadillac!

## IX.

## THE DEN OF THE WOLF

How my heart leaped as I saw that blazon! And then, in an instant, it fell again, for what could three hundred men,—yes, or three thousand men,—be they brave as Bayard, hope to accomplish against this castle in the air? Roquefort might sit on the battlement and laugh at them. True, they might starve him out in the course of months, if their patience could last so long, but ere that Roquefort would have had his will of me and d'Aurilly of Mademoiselle Valérie. Had they been but an hour earlier!

So I watched them with gloomy face as they drew away from the walls and pitched their camp a little distance down the valley, at the crest of a small hill. Evening was at hand, and the shadows, deepening first at the foot of the valley, stole silently up the hillsides until all the world below me was wrapped in darkness. Through my window I could see a broad strip of sky, with a galaxy of stars twinkling brightly in it, and I knew that the night was a fair, sweet, clear one. If only Claire and I might wander through it with only the stars for company!

Soon the fires of the camp gleamed out, first one and then another, and finally many of them. To right and left of the camp beacons were lighted to guard against surprise, and I knew that M. le Comte was preparing for any fortune. In the town too a light shone here and there, and the murmur which floated up from the streets proved that the town-people had not yet done with discussing the advent of this new enemy.

A noise at the door brought me from the window. I heard the bolts thrown back, the door opened, and Drouet appeared on the threshold, bearing a flickering lantern in one hand and a plate of bread and

meat and can of water in the other. These he set upon the floor, and with a not unfriendly gesture motioned me to them. In faith, I was hungry enough, and needed no second bidding! Drouet placed his lantern on the floor and sat down opposite me. For a time he watched me in silence, as though enjoying the sight of my hunger, but I knew that he could not keep silence long, for I had already proved his love of gossip.

"I dare say you saw that little show down yonder," he remarked at last. "Cadillac would better have remained at home. Here he can only starve. He will find scant forage in these hills."

"You do not know M. le Comte," I retorted with a confidence I confess I did not feel. "He will smoke you out of this hole yet, and then 'twill be time to say your prayers. Possibly you have already felt his hand and so know its weight."

Drouet smiled somewhat ruefully.

"Possibly," he admitted; "yet if he venture to assault this place, he nor his men will ever see Cadillac again."

At the bottom of my heart I believed him, but I held my smile.

"Yet he has his points," he continued after a moment. "He sent a warning to M. le Duc just now, threatening I know not what if the girl and you two youngsters were not surrendered unharmed forthwith. You should have seen M. le Duc's face! He sent back a warm message too. 'Tell your master,' he said to the envoy, 'I propose to change Mademoiselle de Cadillac into Madame d'Aurilly. We will then make such treaty as we see fit to prevent d'Aurilly wearying of his wife. This spy from Marsan is going to bawl his life out on the rack. As for the other, I have not yet decided.' And the envoy went away to deliver this pretty news. One can imagine how Cadillac will receive it! How those two hate each other! France is not wide enough to hold them both."

"And when is this marriage to take place?" I asked, affecting to pass over that portion of the message which concerned myself, though it struck me to the heart.

"Soon," and Drouet winked. "You see, M. d'Aurilly is hungering to possess this pretty piece of womanhood—it seems he is even in love with her! To-morrow, perhaps, or next day. M. le Duc is a man who never delays, and he has a priest here who is most obliging."

"The King," I cried, "will have something to say to that! There are rumors of strange plots which affect your master. He may go too far!"

But Drouet only laughed.

"Paris is a long way off," he said, "and the King has much that concerns him nearer home. Besides, this castle could set at naught even a King's army, should any be brought against it, which is most

unlikely. But in all this rush of events do not despair—you will not be forgotten. M. le Duc himself will wish to see you ere long," and he chuckled to himself as he picked up his lantern and moved towards the door.

For an instant I burned to spring upon him, to pull him down, to kill him with his own poniard. But there was doubtless a sentry in the corridor, who could bring me down with a single musket shot—not yet—not yet—and I let him pass. I must first find a plan—a plan. Come, what were my wits for?

I lay down on my pallet in one corner to think it over. But what a problem! To escape from this stronghold in the air, with only one's bare hands to aid! It was too much for even a Marsan's cunning!

A musket-shot far down the hill brought me out of my thoughts and to my feet. It was followed by another and another, and as I rushed to my window I fancied I could hear a chorus of yells, as of men fighting hand to hand. The cries rose and fell and died away—then a tremendous explosion shook the earth. Far below me I saw a great spurt of flame shoot upward, and I knew that M. le Comte was blowing in the gates of Marleon. At least, he could make himself master of the town. There was for a few moments a renewal of the fighting, and then all was still again.

I thought the attack over, and was just turning to rest when there came another burst of firing from behind the hill—M. le Comte was trying to force the castle! The firing waxed and waned and died away. I listened in vain for any further outcry. Plainly, he had been repulsed, and seeing how desperate the road was, had not ventured a second assault. Would he ever venture it, I wondered! He loved his daughter, to be sure, yet would it not be the purest folly to dash himself to pieces against this rock in the attempt to rescue her? What could he hope to accomplish? And whenever Roquefort scented danger, could he not threaten reprisals on Mademoiselle herself? Better to draw off, to leave Mademoiselle to such fate as Roquefort had prepared for her, and wait another day, when, by some ruse or sudden ambushade, Roquefort and d'Aurilly might be made to pay drop for drop!

Weighted with such bitter thoughts, I lay down again upon my pallet and this time dropped asleep. Nor did I waken till someone shook me roughly, and I opened my eyes to see Drouet standing above me and full day peering in at the window.

"God's blood!" he cried, "but you sleep soundly! Here, get up and eat. You will need your strength this day!"

I got to my feet and looked at him.

"And why?" I asked as carelessly as I could, for there was a menace in his words that chilled me.

"Because you are to have a little interview with Mother Brodequin and others of her family."

"Mother Brodequin?" I repeated.

"Yes," and he bent over towards one foot and made a gesture as of tightening a screw. "You understand? It is our pet name for her. She is not lovely to look at, but she has a tight embrace."

I understood, and I found my appetite for the food suddenly vanished. I protest I am no coward—but the boot—the rack—I knew not what horrors—lay before me. 'Twas enough to chill the courage of any man. Still, I made pretence of eating that Drouet might not see my terror.

"I heard some shots last night," I said at last. "Was there an attack?"

"Hardly that," he laughed. "Cadillac tried to crawl up the road, but two or three shots sent him headlong down again. He will not try it a second time unless he is madder than I think him."

"But he gained the town," I said.

"The town, yes. But the town is nothing. M. le Duc never deigns to assist in its defence; its walls are down in a dozen places. That was no victory. He will never take the castle."

I quite agreed, but held my tongue.

"M. le Duc holds the upper hand," he added exultantly. "How he will squeeze Cadillac dry ere he is done with him! But there, I must go. Somehow when I am with you I run to gossip. But then you will talk so little in this world!"

"When is this interview to take place?" I asked.

"Soon," and he laughed. "There are certain preparations to be made, but they will not take long," and, still laughing, he was gone.

I gazed about the cell helplessly. Was there no way out? Must I fall victim to this monster of a Roquefort? To fall in fair fight, in warm blood, in the open day, were nothing—a man could go to death then gladly. But slowly, in a dark cellar, with others looking on exulting—ugh! I felt my nerves quivering at the horror of the thought—and then, with set teeth, I put the weakness from me. Other men—yes, and women—had gone to the same fate with smiling lips—why not I, a Marsan?

So when Drouet opened the door again he found me looking from my window down upon M. le Comte's camp, and I flatter myself that he was surprised at the calmness of my greeting.

"You will follow me, Monsieur," he said in a tone somewhat repressed. Perhaps even he was beginning to pity me.

"Willingly," I answered, and after him I went, out into the hall, where two sentries fell in behind me, down the stair, across a gloomy interior court to a great stone tower standing somewhat detached, then down another stair. I felt my head grow giddy as we left behind us the good air and the bright sunshine—perhaps I was nevermore to

see them, or to see them only from a racked and crooked body. But again I caught my manhood back to me and went on down the stair with a step tolerably firm.

A torch was blazing at the foot, lighting partially a dismal passage which seemed to lead into the very bowels of the earth. Down this Drouet turned, and paused, at last, before a door.

"This is the place," he said in a low tone. "Enter," and he opened the door and stood aside.

I noted how thick it was, how heavy—plainly no cry, however shrill and agonized, could pierce it. For an instant the thought came to me to hurl myself upon my guards, to tear them by the throat until they should be forced to kill me—that would be the easier way. Yet—oh, heart of youth!—perhaps beyond the door there were not certain death—there might yet be a chance—and life was sweet!

So I stepped across the threshold and heard the door swing shut behind me.

## X.

### THE QUESTION

Two torches blazing from brackets in the wall at the farther end threw fantastic shadows along the floor and up against the ceiling. For an instant, as I looked at them, my eyes were dazzled, and then I saw that on a platform below the lights sat Roquefort and by his side d'Aurilly. A dozen men-at-arms stood guard, with something sinister and threatening in their very immobility, and in the corner to one side I caught a glimpse of an array of great, shapeless things, whose uses I did not permit my thoughts to dwell upon.

"This way, sirrah!" called Roquefort, and then sat silent until I stood before him, the torchlight full upon my face. It was then I understood why the torches were so placed—the face of the judge in shadow—the face of the prisoner in full light. How many had stood so and felt those eyes probing deep into their souls! For even from the shadow I could catch the gleam of those serpent's eyes.

"Well, M. de Marsan," he began at last, "it seems that Cadillac could not save you after all, despite your lying."

"Not yet, Monsieur," I answered, still with some show of confidence.

"Not yet!" he cried. "Body of God! Think you there is yet a chance? Three shots, last night, drove him headlong back into the plain. Why, Monsieur, he would be too late were he thundering at the gate this instant! The time is too short!"

I saw d'Aurilly leering at me, all his malicious joy in his hawk-face, and the sight fired my blood.

"At least," I said, "I shall die an honest man, and neither a traitor nor an abductor of women!"



D'Aurilly started from his seat with an oath, and in an instant I should have had my fingers at his throat, but that Roquefort held him back.

"No, no," he laughed. "Restrain yourself, d'Aurilly. That were too swift a way. One blow of a sword and it is over—but the rack is different. I wonder at you, my friend!"

"True!" muttered d'Aurilly, and sank back into his seat with livid face.

"I see you have not yet forgotten that blow of my hand across your mouth, Monsieur," I sneered, resolved to provoke him to the uttermost. Pray Heaven I might yet get my hands on this devil and have a moment in which to settle my account with him. Then could I die almost content.

His hands were trembling on the arms of his chair, but he glared at me without replying.

"Ho, what is this tale, d'Aurilly?" questioned Roquefort. "Do you tell me that this rascal struck you in the face and lived to boast of it? I thought you a man of spirit!"

"He lies!" cried d'Aurilly. "He lies! It was nothing."

I looked at him, smiling. Roquefort, I think, could tell where the truth lay, but he passed it by.

"Come, M. de Marsan," he said more sternly, "we are wasting time, and I have much to do this day. You will remember the reward I promised you should you betray me at Cadillac," and he made a little gesture towards the horrors in the corner. "Well, the reward is ready; only since then I have learned something that may perhaps alter matters. In the first place, I learned from the Vicomte d'Aurilly that you carried to your master at Montauban a message which told of my little expedition against Cadillac. This message, it seems, was brought to you at Marsan by some member of my household. In the second place, I learned from Drouet, as you know, that someone in the night had come to your aid, had cut the ropes which bound you to him, and that you were within an ace of escaping."

He paused for a moment. I could guess at what was coming.

"D'Aurilly has been good enough to represent me in Cadillac's household, not caring, at first, to trust me to secure for him that black-eyed Valérie, but preferring to rely on his own charms. Well, it appears his charms had no great effect, so, in the end, he was glad to come to me for aid," and Roquefort looked at his companion with just a spark of malice in his eyes. "It was not until he had managed to join my troop in that brush at Cadillac that I learned the truth—that we have a spy and traitor among us. I had suspected it before, when my plans had come to naught, but proof was always lacking. Well, Monsieur, I desire the name of that traitor."

On that point, at least, I could answer fully.

"M. le Duc," I said, "I do not know his name. I do not even know his appearance. I know only that one night a man rode into Marsan carrying a message which he entrusted to my father, who, in turn, gave it to me. I saw the man but a moment; it was night, and his face was so well concealed that I caught not a glimpse of it."

Roquefort was glaring down at me, his face working.

"Doubtless the person who cut your bonds three nights since was also invisible!" he cried. "Or did you, by any chance, see his face, M. de Marsan?"

My blood leaped back into my heart. I looked into his eyes horrified—seeing myself at the edge of a precipice.

"Well, Monsieur," said Roquefort after a moment, "I am waiting an answer. Come, your tongue is not so ready."

The sweat broke out across my forehead as I stood there looking at him. I thought bitterly of the hopes that had sat on my saddle-bow as I rode out from Montauban—it seemed hard that they should end like this. But if Fate willed it—what then? Certainly, I had done what I could.

"M. le Duc," I answered with what calmness I could, "I have nothing more to say."

His face turned purple and his eyes became two sparks of fire, miniaturizing the torches which blazed behind him, yet his voice was calm.

"Remember my warning, Monsieur," he said. "I am not a man who breaks his word. Either you must be stretched yonder in a moment—or this spy. I swear it! I have suffered too much from him to pass it by. There is no other way—even your Gascon wits cannot devise one."

I looked from him to d'Aurilly and back again. There was no mercy in either countenance—only d'Aurilly exulted openly. And the thought came to me that I might yet save Mademoiselle from the fate that threatened her and win for myself an easy death. There was no time to hesitate.

Perhaps he saw me gather for the spring or read my thought in my eyes, for he gave a little cry and started from his chair even as my foot was on the first step of the platform. But I was on him before he could get his poniard out—my fingers clutched at his throat with all the frenzied eagerness of hate—and we crashed backward over the chair together.

I heard a confused shouting, a rush of many feet, but I saw only the working face before me, with its staring eyes, its gaping mouth, with the swollen, quivering tongue within. God! what a lust of blood was on me as I gripped his throat and crushed it! I knew he was fumbling for his dagger—I knew that in an instant a sword-thrust

from behind would end it—yet it seemed ages before they were upon me, pulling me off.

"God's blood! Pull him up!" yelled Roquefort, and they jerked me to my feet; but the other came with me too, for my fingers were set as death itself might have set them.

I felt the others pulling at them, but my teeth were set—this man was mine! They should not take him from me! But Roquefort himself strode up at last, and ran a dagger-point under my fingers, prying them back and cutting them cruelly. Only I did not then feel the hurt—my whole soul was in the gaze I bent upon d'Aurilly as he lay there before me—if only he were dead! if only he were dead! Then I might go in peace to my own death!

"Bring Briquet!" called Roquefort, "and quick about it!"

In a moment a figure entered from the dark corner.

"Here is work for you," said Roquefort, and pointed to the man on the floor.

The surgeon bent over him for a moment, felt his wrist, and looked into his eyes. Then he stood up again.

"There is work for the gravedigger, not for me, M. le Duc," he said. "You twisted the necklet a shade too tightly."

"Necklet!" repeated Roquefort, strangled by rage. "Body of God! It was no necklet—'twas yonder scoundrel's fingers!"

Briquet turned and looked at me with a little air of curiosity.

"He must have strong fingers," he observed.

But Roquefort's rage had quite mastered him.

"We shall see!" he yelled. "We shall test every muscle of him! Remain here, Briquet—I want the end deferred as long as it may be! To the rack with him!"

I strained to hurl from me the scoundrels who held me to right and left, but they were doubtless accustomed to the work, for they threw me by some trick of wrestling, and seizing me by arm, leg, thigh, and body, bore me into the shadows of the farther corner.

If ever man fought to save himself, I fought then, but I had no chance—I saw it in a moment. First one arm, then the other, was strapped down above my head, and in an instant I felt the straps drawn tight about my ankles. I strained at them till I thought my veins would burst, but they held quite firm. Then, with white fear at my heart, I lay still and waited. I could do no more!

They brought the torches and stuck them into brackets in the wall above me, where they would illumine every line of my face. Roquefort took his place at the foot, where he could look down into my eyes. Briquet stationed himself beside me and looked at me as one interested in a new experiment. Plainly his heart had been hardened by a hundred such spectacles. And yet, as I looked up at him, I fancied I saw

in his eyes a look of encouragement. Where had I seen that face before? Somewhere, surely!

"Is all ready?" asked Roquefort.

The men grunted an assent.

He looked at me again, and read something in my eyes I would not have had him see there.

"I think we shall yet learn the name of the spy," he sneered. "I think we shall soon have this scoundrel's soul bare before us! Turn the wheel, men!"

## XI.

### ROQUEFORT'S PRICE

I HEARD the wheel creak around, and a sudden spasm of pain shot through elbows, shoulders, knees, and hips as the ropes tightened. I set my teeth to stifle back the cry I knew the next turn must wring from me, and glanced up at Roquefort leering down at me. Thank God, I had settled accounts with that other devil! He, at least, was not there to gloat over my agony! This one I must leave to M. le Comte.

"Well, M. de Marsan," he drawled, "are you yet ready to tell me the name of the spy? Think well before you answer. Your present position is not an easy one, perhaps, but it is a bed of roses compared to what it will be when that wheel has been turned twice round."

I bit my lips to keep back the curses that rose to them.

"Come, you are obdurate," said Roquefort after a moment. "Briquet, explain to him the effect of turning the wheel twice more."

"The first turn will dislocate the shoulders," said Briquet in a tone of professional indifference. "The second turn will dislocate the hips."

The voice!—where had I heard it? I stared up at him! I could have sworn there was white hate in the look he bent upon his master.

"And the third turn, Briquet?" urged Roquefort.

"The third turn will render the dislocations permanent by tearing away the gristle which binds bone to bone—ball to socket."

I felt my heart grow cold with terror. Had God a hell to fit such devils? Yet other men had borne it—day after day they had borne it, and still smiled. Well, I would bear it too!

"So you will not speak?" asked Roquefort, reading my defiance in my eyes. "As you will. Only, I warn you, you are playing the fool, M. de Marsan," and he turned to give the signal to the men at the wheel.

But the signal was not given. Even as he turned, the outer door was flung back and hurrying feet dashed into the chamber and across it towards us. Everyone stared, astounded, to see who this might be that had defied Roquefort's orders. Not until they came full within

the circle of light from the torches could I see them—and how my heart leaped, for I looked up into Claire's eyes, and back of her saw Brissac's anxious face.

"We are in time," she said in a voice almost a whisper. "Thank God! Loose that wheel, you scoundrels!"

Mechanically, without thinking from whom the order came, they permitted the wheel to spin back. What a blessed relief it was!

Then she turned to Roquefort with blazing eyes.

"You are a brute—a monster!" she cried. "Oh, I did well to think twice before accepting you for a husband!"

I could not keep back the cry that burst to my lips. So that story Fronsac had told me was true! But she merely glanced at me and turned again to Roquefort, who was watching her with eyes inflamed by passion.

"It was only by the merest chance I learned a moment since what devil's work was toward here," she went on. "You will release him at once, Monsieur."

But Roquefort only laughed.

"My faith," he said, "how beautiful you are once you get in a passion! Come, Claire, you must be mine, after all! Only I can appreciate you! I am not milk and water—I can meet fire with fire!"

She looked at him with scornful eyes.

"Are you going to continue in this coward's work?" she asked.

He saw the contempt in her look and it stung him.

"Mademoiselle," he said coldly, his face growing stern, "this is something that is no concern of yours. This fellow knows of the existence of one spy, and perhaps of two, in my household. I propose to turn that wheel until their names are wrung from him."

"And this to the man who saved your honor!" she sneered. "Your gratitude is truly princely, M. le Duc!"

Roquefort stared at her, amazed.

"My honor?" he repeated. "I do not understand, Mademoiselle."

She looked at her uncle over her shoulder, and something in her eyes brought him forward. But his face was livid—plainly, he did not relish this bearding of the lion.

"Permit me to explain, M. le Duc," he said. "You will remember that I told you of the attack upon me at Montauban, which would inevitably have secured from me certain papers but for the assistance which came to me opportunely."

Roquefort nodded grimly.

"I remember," he said. "Go on."

"Well, M. le Duc, I did not tell you the name of our rescuer, not thinking that it would interest you and not knowing at the time that he was a prisoner. It was not until Claire came to me just now

and told me that I knew. Then I hastened here, that you also might know. M. le Duc, the man who saved your papers lies there before you!"

Roquefort stared at him a moment and then down on me.

"This fellow!" he stammered, as though not believing his ears.

"But he is one of Cadillac's men!"

"He saved us," said Brissac quickly, "not asking which side we served—seeing only that we were in deadly peril."

"And that the girl was pretty," added the other, glancing at her keenly. "I can read the story—it is an old one among you Gascons."

"At any rate, he saved us, M. le Duc," interrupted Brissac with a touch of impatience.

"Yes, he saved you, perhaps," assented Roquefort, "but he refuses to answer my questions. I am grateful for the one; the other I cannot forgive. He must be made to answer."

I saw Brissac flush darkly and Claire grow pale. You may well conceive with what intentness I stared up at this scene—with what agony of earnestness I watched the face of each of the actors in it.

"What are these questions, M. le Duc?" asked Brissac at last.

"The first is—the name of the man who sent a message from here to Marsan, which this fellow carried to Montauban. He says he did not see the messenger—at least, not his face—and that he does not know his name. But the other question cannot be evaded so easily. I want the name of the person who, three nights ago, cut the bonds which held him to Drouet."

I saw the blood sweep in a wave from Claire's face as she came slowly forward. I understood what she was about to do, and implored her with my eyes not to speak, but she did not even glance at me.

"Do you mean, M. le Duc," she asked, in a voice strained by emotion, "that if you have the name of this person you will release M. de Marsan?"

Roquefort glanced at her, surprised by her emotion.

"Perhaps," he said. "I had sworn to have his life, but the story you have told me counts in his favor."

"Then, M. le Duc," she said firmly, "learn that I am the person. M. de Marsan chose not to betray me, but I can betray myself."

I could feel the force with which Roquefort gripped the bottom of the rack to steady himself under the blow.

"You!" he cried. "You!" and he glared at her with bloodshot eyes. "Body of God! But this is beyond endurance! You—Claire de Brissac, whom I have honored with the offer of my hand—a traitor!"

"Not a traitor, M. le Duc," she protested proudly. "I sought merely to save the life of a man who had saved my uncle's. I am still seeking to do so. Surely I have succeeded!"



But Roquefort was looking down at me and did not answer.

"Tell me, M. de Marsan," he said at last, "is this pretty story true—this story of the rescue?"

"Quite true, M. le Duc."

"And did Cadillac know?"

"He recognized me at once, Monsieur. So did Letourge. He was in bed——"

"In bed?" queried Roquefort, surprised.

"In bed—yes. It was he whom Mademoiselle struck across the face with a white-hot iron. He will always wear the scar."

"And he did not hang you?"

"He was about to, Monsieur. Only, in the end, he determined to prove whether I or d'Aurilly were the traitor."

Roquefort looked across the room to where the traitor's body lay, a dark heap on the platform.

"Ah, yes, I had forgot," he murmured. Then he turned to Claire. "Mademoiselle," he said, "since you answer yourself, I quite absolve M. de Marsan, and out of gratitude for that exploit of his am ready to release him."

I heard Claire breathe a sigh of relief as he paused; but I saw the devil in his eyes. I knew that the end was not yet.

"Unfortunately," he went on, "there is another count against M. de Marsan—a very grave count. Look yonder, on the platform, Mademoiselle; do you see that thing lying there? An hour since that was the Vicomte d'Aurilly—now it is a mere heap of carrion. It was M. de Marsan who sprang upon him and wrought the transformation, and M. de Marsan must answer for it."

"A coward and a traitor, Monsieur," breathed the girl, "not worthy a second thought."

"A coward and a traitor, perhaps," assented Roquefort; "but, nevertheless, my guest and killed within my house."

I read the implacable purpose in his voice—so did the others, and I saw Claire steadying herself against the wall. How I loved her! And I devoured her sweet face with my eyes. It would be easy to go to death with that image in my heart!

She stood a moment so, looking down at me, her eyes dark with horror. What eyes they were! And Roquefort was looking at her too, reading her heart.

"Kindly take Mademoiselle to her apartments, Brissac," he said at last. "She will not care to witness what is to follow."

So the moment had come!

"Adieu, Mademoiselle," I said as calmly as I could. "It is to be adieu this time, it seems. You have done what you could to save me, and I shall die quite happy, knowing that you care. Only," I added,

with a smile I could not make wholly tearless, "it would have been good to live, knowing it—for I love you, Mademoiselle. Pardon my saying it here, before these others—but I want you to think of me always as loving you."

Her lips were trembling and her eyes bright with tears. God! To live—life would be worth something now!

"M. le Duc," she asked at last in a choking voice, "is there no price which will prevent this murder?"

He looked from her to me and back again. I saw hot desire leap to life in his eyes as he gazed at her—her face, her arms, the poise of her figure!

"Only one, Mademoiselle," he answered very quietly.

"And what is that, Monsieur?"

Again he looked at her, dwelling on her beauty, her girlishness, her innocence.

"That is yourself, Mademoiselle."

I started from the rack, but the straps held me back.

"Mademoiselle," I cried, hot with rage, "I forbid such a sacrifice—you wife to this scoundrel! His worst with me must be less hideous than that!"

But Roquefort waved me to silence.

"Understand, Mademoiselle," he said quietly, "that I make you the offer of my hand only out of courtesy, because I want you to come willingly to my bed. I have a passion for you—I desire you—and I am going to have you! Heretofore, since your uncle was too weak to command you, I have urged my suit discreetly. Hereafter I shall carry it with a high hand. You are, self-confessed, a traitor to me, and I can do with you as I please. I have the right over you of justice, high and low! Yet I am generous—yet still do I offer you the title of Madame la Duchesse de Roquefort, and your lover's life besides. There are few women who would need to be asked twice. Nor do I intend to ask you twice, Mademoiselle. I am weary of your indifference. You will choose now whether you will be my wife willingly, or——"

His glance finished the sentence. She understood—so did Brissac. White-livered coward, why did he not strike the scoundrel down where he stood? I jerked at the straps in an agony of rage. His wife or his mistress! A pretty choice!

"But, M. le Duc," began Brissac in protest.

Roquefort turned slowly and looked at him, with eyes red with malignant menace. Brissac stood silent, with twitching lips. Yes, he was a coward, as Fronsac had said.

Then Roquefort turned again to the girl.

"I await your answer, Mademoiselle," he said with an infernal calmness.

She looked about for a moment helplessly, as though seeking some way of escape. There was only one that I could see—and I cursed the straps that held me helpless there! If only God would grant it me to kill this monster!

"Mademoiselle," I began, "Claire!" and then stopped—what could I advise? Yet the thought of her in that devil's arms maddened me.

She looked at me for an instant—at the hard bed on which I lay—at the men ready at the wheel—then her eyes swept back to Roquefort.

"M. le Duc," she said quite calmly, "I accept. Only, I warn you, you will get no loving wife."

He bowed to her with infinite politeness. The scoundrel was not without his points. He could meet fire with fire, as he had said.

"All that will come after," he retorted, with an infernal smile. "I assure you that you will find me a loving husband. As to your lover—I will take care to protect myself from him!"

He looked down at me, the smile still on his lips.

"But the arrangements," he continued after a moment. "I must acquaint you with them, Mademoiselle. We were to have had a wedding to-morrow morning, only, unfortunately, the bridegroom lies dead yonder. Well, we will have the wedding, only it will be you and I who take the vows. You agree?"

Her face became more livid as she saw how near her martyrdom was, but there was no relenting in his features. She nodded faintly.

"Very well," he said approvingly, "that is right, Mademoiselle. Make the best of it. I am not such a monster as you seem to think. I am a man, like any other, and have my generous moments. I hasten to order the arrangements. As for Mademoiselle de Cadillac, I must select her another husband from among my followers. Permit me to conduct you to your room, Mademoiselle. As soon as we are safe outside, this fellow will be released and taken back to his tower. Immediately after the wedding he shall be returned to Cadillac unharmed. I swear it on my honor. Does that satisfy you?"

Again she nodded, and Roquefort paused for a moment to look down at me.

"My faith, M. de Marsan," he laughed, "you look as though you were itching to treat me as you did d'Aurilly."

"God will yet give me the chance!" I answered, between my teeth.

He laughed again and led the girl to the door, leaving me jerking convulsively at my straps.

## XII.

## A MESSAGE FROM WITHOUT

I LAY for some hours in my cell, dazed by this new misfortune, nursing my aching muscles and smarting fingers. I had, it is true, saved Mademoiselle Valérie from the most immediate danger which threatened her, but only to hurl her into an abyss more frightful, for Roquefort had said that he would soon select another man to wed her, and he could hardly fail to be more vulgar than d'Aurilly, so that in the end she would fare worse than ever. For a moment I found it in my heart to regret that I had killed d'Aurilly, then the memory of his great villanies came back to me and the regret passed. Earth were well rid of him!

After a time Drouet brought my dinner, and inquired with pretended solicitude about my injuries. I told him they were not worth speaking of, though my fingers were very sore from the dagger-cut and my muscles still ached abominably. He saw I was in no mood for talk and soon left me to myself.

I had no relish for the food, and went to the window in the faint hope that I might see some promise of assault in M. le Comte's camp below, but the hope died as I looked down at it. The force was still there, indeed, but the men were sprawled here and there in little groups and the horses were grazing along the river. He had not taken possession of the town, preferring, doubtless, to levy upon the inhabitants for supplies and leave them the possession of their houses. Besides, in the town there was danger of surprise or betrayal. Yonder on the hilltop there was none.

But I could guess how M. le Comte was eating his heart out gazing at this fortress on a cliff and wondering what had befallen his daughter. It is not an easy thing for a man who has ordered things ever as he pleased to sit down quietly and accept defeat. Yet had he ten times the men, success had been far off as ever.

I was about to turn away when I heard a little rustling on the wall outside the window, and saw that it was caused by a piece of paper dangling at the end of a string. It was jerked vigorously back and forth. In a second I understood. Someone on the parapet, just over me, was trying to attract my attention. Plainly, the paper was for me. I strained my arm through the window and at last managed to grasp it. With fast-beating heart I drew it in and took it from the string, which was jerked away as soon as I released it. Then I unfolded the paper and read. The note ran:

"Monsieur, I have learned of your demeanor at the question and am grateful, for I am he who brought the warning to Marsan. While it is true you do not know my

name, I am sure, nevertheless, that you might have pointed me out had you wished to do so. To-night I think I can aid you, and also the others. At six o'clock Drouet will bring you your supper. Detain him in talk until the guards are changed, which will be perhaps ten minutes. Then put him for a moment off his guard, seize his poniard, and kill him. This will require courage and address, which I am certain you possess. There is a sentry in the corridor, but you need not fear him, as I will see that he does not trouble you. In the cell below yours M. de Fronsac is quartered. Drouet will have the key to the door somewhere about him, since he delivers M. de Fronsac's supper before coming up to you. He will doubtless have also the other keys to the tower.

"At seven o'clock Mademoiselle de Cadillac will come out for her usual evening walk upon the parapet, which she is permitted to take alone. There is, however, a sentry at either end of the parapet. These you will have to silence. She will be looking for you.

"After she has joined you, descend at once to the bottom of the east tower—the one in which you are. A flight of steps runs down into the rock. Descend these. At the bottom you will find a small door, heavily barred. You will see this opens on the face of the cliff, and if you look attentively, you will discern little steps cut in the rock. By means of a rope to steady one's self, these steps may be descended. The rope is kept always lying by the door. The great difficulty will be to get the door open. Only Roquefort himself has the keys, and you will have to break it down. This will be no easy task, but the sentry's musket may prove of service. As the watches are changed at six o'clock your escape will probably not be discovered until midnight, so that you will have six hours in which to work. Much may be accomplished in that time. If you succeed, commend me to M. le Comte."

You can conceive with what joy I read this message, with its plan of escape so admirably mapped out. At first glance it seemed quite easy, but as I considered it various difficulties appeared. However, I am not one who borrows trouble, and I put these doubts behind me. For, after all, here was hope in place of black despair—hope—and then, of a sudden, I saw that it was not hope at all—at least, not for me. We might escape,—we three,—but what of Claire? Would I not be deserting her to the mercy of this monster who knew no mercy? Well, we should see. At the worst, I could seek out this devil, sword in hand, and cut him down ere he could summon aid. I could see the others safely down the cliff and then turn back upon my errand. That would mean death for me also—but if there were no other way, it would at least save Claire from the insult of his caresses.

I read the message through a second time, and found myself wondering—who was this traitor in Roquefort's household? No ordinary

man, certainly, and one who kept his secret well. I knew so little of Roquefort's followers—and I had caught but a glimpse of the messenger's face. Well, M. le Comte would reward him.

Those hours of waiting were the longest I have ever known. I was eager to strike in the first flush of confidence,—that is ever my way, for I grow timid, sometimes, on second thought,—but now I must worry through three mortal hours. Worry through them I did, somehow—but it was with quivering nerves I heard Drouet at last throw the bolts. As the door opened I caught a glimpse of the sentry in the corridor. Drouet set my platter on the floor.

"There's your supper," he said.

"And the last that I shall eat here," I added laughingly. "Will you not be sorry to bid me adieu?"

"Bid you adieu?" he asked. "How is that?"

"I am to be released to-morrow morning," I explained, "so soon as M. le Duc and Mademoiselle Brissac are married. He has promised on his honor."

"So he is to have her at last, is he?" grinned Drouet. "Well, my faith, he has waited long enough. Had I been he, I would have had her months ago, and without troubling for a priest's blessing. That is the safest way, for he may weary of her—he may in time see some one younger, fresher," and he leered at me in a way that sent the blood to my face.

"He has pursued her long, then?" I asked with what indifference I could muster.

"Long! Since the day she came last spring from the Sacred Heart at Toulouse, where the good sisters were caring for her. He had no sooner set eyes on her than he was mad for her. At first we all thought we should have a new Duchesse within a month, for M. le Duc is not the man for a girl just out of a convent to resist; but someone whispered into her ear the story of the first Duchesse, and perhaps some other tales besides. What would not M. le Duc do to the tale-bearer could he discover him! The first Duchesse is dead—dead," and he laughed a mocking laugh. "There was a story! She was found one morning at the cliff-foot here, broken to pieces! She had flung herself over, perhaps. There were those who said that M. le Duc had wearied of her, as he will weary of this one—that the fall was not wholly an accident. However that may have been, the girl refused to look at him after she heard the story. She was just from the convent, you see—her conscience was yet warm. M. le Duc swore he would have her. Her indifference only inflamed him the more. Really, before this, I thought he would use the strong arm."

"But her uncle," I questioned. "What of him?"

"Brissac? Pouf!" and Drouet grimaced contemptuously. "A



man of water fit only for intrigue, where one talks in parables. He fears M. le Duc as he fears the devil; and he also fears this girl, who has a will of her own, despite her baby face. So he stepped discreetly to one side and permitted them to fight it out. Well, M. le Duc will have his hands full. I do not envy him. I prefer a wench whom I need not fear will stab me while I sleep."

"Yes," I assented. My hands were trembling as I realized that the moment had arrived. I marked how his poniard hung—there would be need of quickness, for he was a great, heavy fellow, much stronger, doubtless, than I.

"I must go," he said at last. "I will drink your health at the wedding."

He got slowly to his feet and stepped towards the door. As he passed me, I strained forward, plucked out his poniard and drove it deep into his thigh. I might have struck higher, but at the last instant my heart failed me. I saw his startled eyes staring down at me, then he fell with a great crash.

"Help!" he yelled. "This way!"

But I was upon him, the poniard at his throat.

"Drouet," I said between my teeth, "I spared you an instant since—I might easily have killed you. I swear I will kill you yet if you utter another sound."

He chuckled grimly as he looked towards the door.

"Many thanks, M. de Marsan," he said, "but I think I have already uttered enough to spoil your game."

For an instant I found myself looking over my shoulder with anxious eyes—then I remembered.

"There is no one there, Drouet," I said triumphantly, rejoiced that it was my turn. "The sentry has been attended to."

"Attended to!" he muttered, and looked again towards the door and then at me with distended eyes. "It is a plot, then!"

"A plot—yes," I nodded. "But to business. You will turn over on your face, if you please."

He hesitated, and I compelled his obedience with a prod of the poniard. He turned over slowly, with many groans.

"Now cross your hands behind you."

The hands came back reluctantly.

I snatched his belt from about his waist and in a moment had the hands secure. I pulled on the belt until the blood seemed ready to burst from his finger-tips, for I could take no chances. A strip from his leathern jerkin served as a thong for his feet. I rolled him over.

"You see how much easier it would be for me to kill you than to take all this trouble," I remarked. "But I am merciful—I am no butcher. However, I wish to be quite safe, so I shall be compelled to gag you."

I tore another wide strip from his jerkin and stuffed his mouth full of the straw that had formed my pallet. It was not over clean, but was infinitely better than death. I bound the strip close over it and stood for a moment looking down at him.

"Ah," I said, remembering suddenly my instructions, "you have some keys somewhere about you. Let us see."

I knelt beside him, and in a moment had the keys—a great ring of them. As I arose I saw that he was making a frightful effort to speak.

"What is it," I asked, "the wound?"

He nodded violently.

I knelt again and looked at it. It was bleeding slightly, but did not seem of a serious nature.

"I will fix that for you," I said, and I bound a rag about it to stop the bleeding. "Now you are all right."

I realized that I was spending too much time over Drouet, and I hurried to the door and opened it. In the half-light I saw the sentry lying against the wall. As I dragged him into the cell I shuddered to see that his skull had been crushed by a single blow from behind. Evidently my ally did not share my tender nerves.

I placed him against the wall opposite Drouet, who stared at him with distended eyes, plainly understanding nothing of the mystery of his death.

"That would have been your fate," I said, "had any but I dealt with you. I wish you a pleasant night, Monsieur," and I left the cell, bolting the door behind me. Certainly it would take Roquefort some little time to get it open again and learn Drouet's story.

The corridor was very dark, but I groped my way to the spot where the sentry had fallen, picked up his musket, and made my way down to the floor below. There I found a torch burning, doubtless for the sentry's use. In a moment I was fumbling at the door of the cell there. Half a dozen keys I tried, and at last the lock turned. I threw the door open with feverish haste. Within, I saw a figure lying on a pallet in one corner.

"Fronsac!" I called. "Fronsac!"

He sprang towards me with a cry of amazement.

"Is it you, Marsan? We are going to escape then?"

"We are going to try," I answered, as I returned the warm pressure of his hands. "Come, Monsieur, there is not a moment to lose."

"But Valérie?" he questioned, holding back. "I do not understand. What of her?"

"It is to her we go," I said. "We will take her with us."

His face lighted with a sudden joy.

"Ah, in that case," and he motioned me forward.

I did not wait a second bidding, for I knew that seven o'clock, the

hour of her promenade, could not be far distant. I thrust into his hands the sentry's musket, caught up the torch, and led the way down the stair—two flights more there were, and then a door. I tried it. It was locked.

For a moment my heart sank. Then I bethought myself of Drouet's keys. I tried them, one after another—joy!—the bolt yielded! I opened the door cautiously, for fear someone might be without. I could hear Fronsac chafing on the step behind me, but this was no time for haste. Evening had come in earnest and the court upon which the door opened was so dark that I could perceive no one. I listened for a moment, but heard no sound save a stave of a drinking-song shouted afar off.

"Come," I said, "it seems safe. And we have always a place of refuge in this tower, and we reach it in time to bolt the door behind us."

"But Valérie," whispered Fronsac, "where is she?"

"I was told that at seven she would walk upon the parapet," I answered, and by a single impulse we raised our eyes to the heights above us.

I confess I started at what I saw there—Mademoiselle Valérie, outlined against the red sky of the sunset, poised like a bird about to fly, gazing down at us. And at her side another figure—Roquefort.

### XIII.

#### THE DOOR IN THE CLIFF

WITH quivering nerves I dragged Fronsac back into the shadow of the wall. I was certain that Roquefort had seen us, but as the minutes passed and he made no sign, I remembered that looking down into darkness was a very different thing to looking up into light. So at last I stood watching him without fear of his discerning us.

He was talking to Mademoiselle Valérie with great earnestness, and while I could see repulsion swaying her from him, there was some wizardry in his words or manner that chained her to the spot. Her face was turned away from him, but he spoke with accompaniment of look and gesture as though she were returning his intent gaze. What was he explaining?—some deviltry, no doubt! And I remembered that when he left her side we must devise some way of getting to her. As I stood there staring up at them a thought leaped to life in my brain that set my nerves a-quiver—why could we not surprise him there at her side and hurl him down over the battlement? Then would Claire too be released from danger.

But how to gain the parapet? I saw that it ran along a structure that stretched from the great east tower to a smaller one on the north. Perhaps from the tower there was a door that opened upon it.

But Fronsac of a sudden caught my arm.

"Look!" he cried between his teeth. "God's blood! Look!"

I looked and saw Mademoiselle start from her companion in anger, stung by his words; but he caught her arm almost fiercely, and drew her to him. I could see the white face she turned to right and left.

"I will end it," said Fronsac, and stepped from the shadow, musket to shoulder.

But I sprang after him and pulled it down.

"Not that!" I cried. "Not that! That would spoil everything! The garrison would be upon us in a moment!"

He looked at me with working face.

"What then?" he asked. "Quick, Marsan, what then?"

"We must surprise him," I said. "We must gain the parapet. I too have an account to settle with that scoundrel!"

"But how?" he demanded. "Quick!"

"The tower!" I cried.

He hastened after me back to the door. I took care to lock it behind us—at least, we would be secure against surprise from that direction. Then we sped up the stair—up and up. At last, peering from one of the narrow windows, I saw we were on a level with the parapet, but there was no door—only the solid wall of stone.

Fronsac was cursing softly to himself.

"You should have let me end it down below!" he cried. "Now we shall be too late!"

"Come, there must be some way," I muttered in perplexity. "Let us go down a flight."

We retraced our steps, quivering with impatience. But a cry of joy burst from Fronsac as we gained the lower floor.

"There is a door!" he said.

And, sure enough, there it was—a little door of oak, set firmly in the masonry. I held the torch near it and examined it intently.

"Well, we must pause here," I said at last, "unless, by chance, Drouet carried a key to this also. Let us see."

I ran rapidly through the bunch I had taken from him, trying one after another, but not one would throw back the bolt.

"Come, let us go down again," cried Fronsac. "I have still the musket," and he started down the stair.

I caught at the door and pulled at it savagely. It swung open in my hand.

Then I saw what fools we had been. Small wonder none of our keys would throw the bolt, since it was already thrown! Roquefort must have passed that way to gain the parapet. Then he must still be there! And my heart was beating savagely as we stole through the door and up a short flight of steps. In a moment I saw the stars above me and felt the fresh air of the night upon my face.

Darkness had come in earnest, and even here, high on the parapet, there was only the dim light of the stars. I feared that at the first turn we should run into a sentry, but we had no time to waste in hesitation.

"Do not fire!" I cautioned Fronsac. "What we do must be done silently," and gripping my poniard — Drouet's poniard — tightly, I stepped out. For a moment I could see nothing, and then, away in front of us, I caught a glimpse of two dim figures.

Fronsac saw them in the same instant, and would have sprung forward but that I held him back.

"Softly," I whispered. "Softly. We must surprise him, or he will outwit us yet. Give him an instant's warning, and he might hold us off till aid arrived. We must take no chances."

"As you will," he answered sullenly, and I saw he was hot to be at Roquefort as was I.

I crouched low into the shadow of the battlement, and, motioning Fronsac to follow, stole slowly forward. As we drew near I saw that Roquefort still held the girl by the arm.

"You will listen to reason," he was saying roughly. "Not tomorrow but the next day shall you be wedded. I will provide the man — and while he may be no beauty, I am sure he will love you as you deserve. There is no way out, Mademoiselle, I swear it. I am not like to permit a pretty bird like you to slip through my fingers."

She was looking at him now with defiant eyes. It was easy to see that the spirit of M. le Comte lived in her also.

"You are wasting words, Monsieur," she said quite coldly. "I have already told you my determination," and she made a little gesture towards the cliff. "A leap and it is over. Think you I should hesitate when I knew that on the other side lay a life-time of infamy? You do not know me, Monsieur!"

Roquefort laughed harshly.

"It is easy said, but not so easy done," he retorted. "Death is not pleasant when one looks it in the face. Besides, I shall take care of you. I shall see that this pretty flesh be not wasted in such a way. Some man must have it to wife first!"

I heard a low cry of rage behind me, and Fronsac leaped past me and upon this libertine. I saw Roquefort wheel sharp round at the sound of footsteps, but Fronsac was upon him ere he could draw his sword. The musket flashed in the air, but the other stepped lightly to one side and the blow fell harmless. Then I was upon him too.

Oh, but he was a man! — a match for both of us almost. I struck at his throat to drown the cry I knew would come, but he caught my wrist and held it in a grasp of iron. I felt him turning the point towards my breast, and struck madly at his face; then Fronsac's musket

rose again, there was a sickening blow, and his grip upon my wrist relaxed. For a breath he stood staring wildly into my eyes, then slipped limply down at my feet upon the parapet.

"He is done!" panted Fronsac. "Curse him! He is done!"

"Yes," I said. "Yes," and looked down at him.

But my friend had turned towards the figure which stood sobbing softly against the wall.

"Valérie!" he called, and I saw her sway forward into his arms with a little answering cry. No more I saw, for I turned my back, as I would have others do when I meet my love after long absence and many perils. Yet I could spare them but a moment.

"We must go," I said, and touched Fronsac gently on the arm. "Come, Monsieur. For love you have a hundred to-morrows, but for escape only a few hours."

He swung around upon me, and I could see how his eyes were shining.

"Marsan," he said out of a full heart, "I want you to know Mademoiselle de Cadillac—or, rather, I want her to know you."

I looked into her eyes and saw love and joy flaming there. Verily, it was a good thing to have brought these two together!

"Valérie," he added, "it is Marsan here who has saved us—who has devised this wonderful plan of escape——"

"It was not I at all, Mademoiselle," I protested, but she silenced me with a little gesture.

"There!" she cried, and it was wonderful to see how fatigue and fear had slipped from her. "I quite know what to believe, M. de Marsan! Some time, perhaps, we may find a way to repay you."

I bowed over the hand she gave me. Had I not known another, I might have found it in my heart to envy Fronsac.

"And I," I said, "am happy in this chance to serve you. Besides, we have not yet escaped—we are not yet at the end of the journey. It is foolish to linger here. We must be going."

"True," said the girl, and came suddenly back to earth. "Lead on, Monsieur. We will follow."

As we turned, I heard a groan at my feet.

"So he is not yet dead," muttered Fronsac between his teeth, and picked up his musket for another blow. "Well, we will finish it."

But I caught his arm and held it back.

"No, no," I protested. "Not that. He is not a man to kill here like a dog. Let us find some other way?"

"What other way can there be?" demanded my companion impatiently.

"We must not leave him lying here for the sentries to stumble over," I said. "We must conceal him somewhere."



"Well?" and Fronsac made a gesture towards the battlement.  
"The cliff will settle all that."

But again I shook my head. He was worthy a better fate. Besides, to kill a wounded man——

"Let us take him with us down into the tower," I said at last.  
"They will not find him there, and we can still end it should there be need."

"As you will," assented Fronsac shortly, and we caught him by leg and shoulder and staggered towards the stair that led downward to the tower door. As we stumbled forward I tried in vain to pierce the gloom before us.

"Softly," I whispered. "There is a sentry at either end of the parapet."

"Not to-night," said Mademoiselle quickly. "I heard M. le Duc dismiss them just before he came to me."

I breathed more freely. Certainly Roquefort would not wish to be overheard, yet still this was an unexpected bit of fortune.

Down the stair we tugged him and through the little door, which I locked carefully behind us. We propped our burden in one corner with his back against the wall. He was breathing deeply, with a hoarse, guttural sound, which I felt certain was the death-rattle. There was nothing we could do for him, and we went on down the tower stair, bearing the torch with us. At the foot another narrower flight plunged downward into the living rock of the cliff. I hastened down it, the others following without question. Down and down it went—at what a cost of labor must it have been constructed! At last I was stopped by a little door set in the rock. A coil of rope lay before it.

Fronsac gazed a moment at rope and door, then up into my eyes.

"I begin to understand," he said. "But can we open that door, my friend?"

"We must," I answered. "There is no other way."

But I confess my heart fell as I examined it more closely, for it seemed as strong as the cliff itself. A dozen bolts, seemingly buried in the very heart of the oak, held it to the rock. I could catch a glimpse of them as I pressed my torch to the crevice between wood and stone, and I could see how thick they were. But to move them—to throw them back. I tried all the keys on Drouet's ring; not one of them would serve. I battered at the door with the musket, but could not even shake it. The sweat broke out across my forehead at the thought that this might be the end. I looked up and saw Fronsac watching me with a face from which he tried in vain to banish his concern.

"We have still at least four hours," I said, with what cheerfulness I could muster, and turned back again to the door.

Could I but cut the wood away I might yet throw back the bolts

with the end of my poniard. I hacked at it fiercely. It seemed hard as iron and I could tear away but a splinter at a time. At the end of half an hour I had made little progress.

I paused a moment to take breath.

"The watches are not changed till midnight," I said, seeing Fronsac's despairing face and that of Mademoiselle. "We have near four hours yet, my friend."

But as I turned again to the task a sudden clatter reached us from the hall above as of some one pounding on the tower door. I understood in an instant, and was up the stair in three bounds.

"This way, men!" shouted a hoarse voice. "This way! Rescue!"

I sprang blindly forward, groped an instant in the darkness, and dragged Roquefort back from the door, cursing my folly at leaving him unbound.

For from the court came an answering shout, a rush of feet, and the wood groaned under a great blow.

#### XIV.

##### A PERILOUS DESCENT

"BACK! Back!" I cried to Fronsac, who appeared at the stair-head, bearing the torch, and I followed down close at his heels, dragging Roquefort after me, cursing and striking at me madly with his fists, but too weakened by his wound to do any great damage. In two strides we were at the bottom.

"Your scarf!" I called to Fronsac, and snatched it from him. "Now help me here," and we twisted Roquefort's arms behind him like a baby's and lashed them tight together. Then I set him down on the lowest step,—a horrible sight, the blood caked in his hair and about his face, drivelling, cursing, half-conscious. I could guess what an effort it had cost him to drag himself down the stair and give the alarm, and I found myself beginning to admire him.

I turned again to the door in an agony of despair. To be caught here like rats in a trap, with success so near! But to penetrate this door! I saw Fronsac draw Mademoiselle to him and hold her close against his breast. They had abandoned hope, then! I looked at Roquefort with fiery eyes, hating him suddenly with a white hate.

"At least," I said between my teeth, "you will be dead long ere they reach us here. That shall be your reward for calling them. I swear that, assassin!"

He seemed to understand, and glared at me fiercely.

"This way! Rescue!" he shouted hoarsely. His voice was drowned in this cavern where we were, but as if in answer there came another great crash upon the tower door above us.

It seemed for a moment that Roquefort's scoundrels must be tum-

bling down the stair upon us. But the door held, and as I remembered how strongly it was built, I knew it would be no little task to break it through. The crash was repeated as we stood there listening—then a third time. I fancied I could hear the door splitting under this determined onslaught. Fronsac and Mademoiselle had forgotten all the world except each other. He strained her to him and stood looking down into her eyes, drinking in all the love they revealed to him unquestioningly in this last, desperate moment, whose terror banished coquetry. Had I Claire so, I too might have been content to die. Again came the crash upon the door, and again my eyes sought Roquefort's face.

And then in an instant I remembered! What a fool I had been not to think of it before! Pray Heaven it was not already too late! The keys!

I sprang upon him, merciless as a wolf, and with savage hands tore his doublet from his breast. He seemed to understand what I was after, and spat at me like some mad thing and tried to throw me off, then sank back exhausted, his lips white with froth.

In a moment my fingers had found a chain about his neck. I dragged it forth, and at the end were two keys. So the fox had kept always by him a secret means of escape from his den should the other fail him! I lifted the chain from his neck and the keys were mine. For a breath my hands were trembling so I could scarce hold them, but I gripped my manhood back to me and turned to the door. Were they the keys? They must be! I fitted them to the holes—they slipped in easily—the bolts flew back—the door opened.

A stream of fresh aid rushed in upon us, and I could see again the sweet stars in the deep heaven. The cliff dropped sheer away beneath us. I could see no semblance of foothold, yet the descent must be made. I knotted one end of the line tight to the heaviest bolt, then turned to the two, who were still lost in each other.

"Come, Mademoiselle," I said gently, "you must go first."

"Go!" cried Fronsac, waking as from a dream. "Go whither, Marsan?"

I pointed to the open door—the rope.

"And you have opened it?" he asked, amazed. "What witchcraft!"

"We must hasten," I said. "They are preparing some surprise for us over our heads yonder. Come. We will knot one end of this rope so that Mademoiselle can place her feet in it. Then, standing erect and steadying herself by holding to the rope, we will lower her quite safely to the ground."

I had made the loop even as I was speaking, and threw it a little over the cliff edge.

"Come, Mademoiselle," I said again.

But she drew back with a shuddering cry as she saw the abyss that yawned before her.

"Oh, no!" she cried. "Not that! That is too fearful! I can never do that!"

It was not a time for soft words. Our lives could not be sacrificed to a woman's nerves, and I steeled my heart.

"Mademoiselle," I said, "you are holding all our lives in your hand. In a moment a crowd of ruffians will be through that door up yonder—then it will be too late! No daughter of the Comte de Cadillac could be a coward!"

"Marsan!" cried Fronsac, "you go too far!"

But the girl took her hands from before her face and stopped him with a gesture.

"No," she said quite calmly, "M. de Marsan is right! I thank him for his frankness. No daughter of the Comte de Cadillac could be a coward! I am ready, Monsieur!"

My heart warmed with admiration of her as she advanced quite steadily to the cliff's edge, sat down without shrinking, and adjusted her feet within the loop.

"That is good," I said. "There is no danger whatever, Mademoiselle, so long as you hold the rope firmly and keep your face to the rock. Come, my friend."

I could see her shudder as we swung her out over the abyss, and I admit that my own nerves were not wholly steady, but she held tightly to the rope and in an instant was out of sight. Down and down we lowered her slowly and carefully, I keeping an eye on Roquefort, meanwhile, to see that he essayed no mischief. But he sat quite still on the step where I had placed him, seemingly only half-conscious, and watched us with bloodshot eyes. Yet I was certain that some catastrophe was hanging over us. There had been an ominous silence for some moments at the tower door, but I knew that his men would not abandon him so tamely. What trick they were preparing I could not even guess, but at last the weight lifted from the rope, and we knew that Mademoiselle, at least, was safely down.

"What next, my friend?" asked Fronsac. "What of him?" and he glanced at Roquefort. "Has he not lived long enough?"

I looked at him as he sat drivelling there. Yet I had thought never to kill a man but in a fair fight. And on the instant a sudden inspiration flashed into my brain.

"I have it!" I cried. "We will lower him down the cliff! We will take him prisoner to M. le Comte to deal with as he chooses! There would be a vengeance for you!"

I could see the daredevil in Fronsac take fire at the words. In a

moment he had pulled up the rope, and we were knotting it under Roquefort's arms. He resisted vaguely, weakly, like a drunken man, but we dragged him to the edge and pushed him over. He cried out hoarsely as he fell, and I thought for a breath that his weight would drag us over with him, but the rope caught in a crevice of the rock and gave us time to brace ourselves. Then we lowered him rapidly, rasping and scraping against the cliff, but there was no time to think of that. At last the rope hung taut.

"You next, my friend," I said to Fronsac on the instant. He would have protested, but I pushed him to the edge. "Hasten. Think who awaits you below."

Without a word he let himself carefully over the edge. I could see the rope quivering under the double weight, and noted with anxious eyes how it chafed against the edge of the rock. The moments passed, and at last I saw that he too was down.

I stooped to test the rope where the rock had chafed it, when there came a sudden hideous roar from overhead, a crash of splitting timbers—they had fired a petard against the door—had blown it down—I understood now the reason of their silence!

There was no time to hesitate. I caught the rope and threw myself over the cliff. My knees scraped against the rock, the rope burned deep into my fingers, still smarting from the dagger-cut. But I held fast, praying that they might not see the rope for yet a moment—yet a moment—yet a moment!

Some one tugged at it from above, then it suddenly gave way. I felt myself falling—I grasped at the cliff—I seemed to choke—and the world turned black before me.

## XV.

### ROQUEFORT EXACTS A PROMISE

I OPENED my eyes to find Fronsac bending over me. He had torn the clothing from my breast and had one hand on my heart.

"It still beats!" he said. "Thank God, it still beats! We must get him to your father's surgeon, Valérie."

To the surgeon! I had been hurt, then? And in an instant I remembered—the rope had been cut—I had fallen. Was I dying? The thought sent a shock through me.

"Come, Fronsac," I said, "what is it? How badly am I hurt?"

He replied with a cry of joy.

"Splendid! I feared that you were dead, my friend! Now let us see what bones are broken. Can you move yourself?"

For answer I sat upright, then got unsteadily to my feet. They looked at me as at one risen from the dead.

"But where is Roquefort?" I asked suddenly. "He has not escaped?"



Fronsac pointed to a dark mass which lay just at the cliff-foot.

"He is there," he said. "He is far past escape. He was still bound to the rope when it broke. You fell upon him, which may explain your escape. But we thought you dead!"

"The rope did not break," I said, "it was cut. They blew down the door with a charge of powder."

"But you are quite sure you have no bones broken?" asked Fronsac anxiously.

I stretched my arms and felt myself all over.

"Quite sure," I said at last. "Nothing worse than a few bruises. But let us look at him."

We brought him out from the shadow of the cliff and laid him on his back. Blood was oozing from nose and mouth, but his heart still fluttered faintly.

"We must get him to M. le Comte," I said, "before he dies. Come," and I caught him by the shoulders.

Fronsac took him by the legs, and we set off through the night, Mademoiselle following. The moon was just clear of the horizon and the night was warm and still. We had reached the ground just outside the wall of Marleon, and we left the town to the right, proceeding straight towards the hill where I had seen the camp. At the end of ten minutes I caught the gleam of the camp-fires. But they were a long way off, and more than once we were compelled to lay our heavy burden down and take a moment's rest. At last a sentry stopped us.

"We must see M. le Comte at once," I said. "This is his daughter. You will see the need of haste."

He peered into our faces, his eyes large with astonishment.

"I will take you to him, Monsieur," he said, and set off through the camp.

We had not far to go. At the end of a moment I saw M. le Comte's standard floating above a tent before which blazed a great torch. At the tent door a man was sitting, his head on his hand, the image of despair. Mademoiselle saw him also, and, with a little cry, sprang to him and threw her arms about his neck.

He looked up with a great start.

"Valérie, is it you?" he cried. "Here, safe in my arms. My God! what a miracle!"

He strained her to him as she lay sobbing on his breast. Then he looked up and saw us standing there.

"Fronsac!" he cried. "Marsan! Why, this is a deliverance! And who have you there?" he added, looking at our burden.

"This is M. le Duc de Roquefort," said Fronsac.

"Roquefort!" and M. le Comte was on his feet, the picture of bewilderment. He put his daughter gently from him, came to us, and



bent over the unconscious man. "He is wounded?" he asked. "Bring him hither, then," and he held back the curtain of the tent. "Lay him there," he said, and we placed our burden on the couch.

M. le Comte looked at us again—at his daughter—at Fronsac—at me—at Roquefort, lying there with bloody lips.

"It is a dream," he said. "It is not to be believed—that two men should break their way out of that castle yonder and bring Roquefort with them. It is a dream!"

But Mademoiselle had her arms again about his neck.

"Is that a dream?" she cried, and kissed him full upon the lips. Then she fell back with a little, frightened cry. "What is it?" she asked. "What has happened? Your face!"

He looked at her with terrible eyes, and then at me.

"A wound," he answered hoarsely. "But 'tis healing now."

Yes, it was healing. I could see the drawn, puckered, white edges. A bandage hid the rest—but I could guess what it was like—what it would be always like! And I had been the cause of it!

I think he read my thought, for he held out his hand to me.

"M. de Marsan," he said quite gently, "you have proved it was not you who were the traitor, but d'Aurilly. I have yet to deal with him."

"I have already dealt with him, M. le Comte," and I smiled into his eyes, with a great lightening of the heart that he had forgiven me.

"Dealt with him?"

"With these hands," I answered. "It was he who planned the whole affair. Roquefort had arranged for him to marry Mademoiselle. The wedding was to take place to-morrow."

I could see Fronsac's face turn purple.

"The hound!" he said between his teeth. "The hound!"

"I knew that he was dead," said Mademoiselle. "Roquefort told me. But I did not know, Monsieur, that it was to you I was indebted for this deliverance. It is a great debt we owe you."

"It was nothing," I protested. "It was a joy to my heart to pull him down."

"Tell us," said M. le Comte simply.

So, as briefly as might be, I told them the story of what had happened in the torture-chamber.

At the end M. le Comte held out his hand again.

"You are a man, M. de Marsan," he said warmly. "I count myself fortunate to have found a liege so gallant. I shall remember it."

"But he has not told you all, M. le Comte!" cried Fronsac. "It was he who planned the escape—I was but a follower, a looker-on. I had despaired a dozen times, but he always found a way. It was magnificent!"

"No, no," I protested again, and stopped. M. le Comte was looking at me and laughing.

"M. de Marsan," he said, "I will spare your blushes. Only permit me to say that I shall not soon forget the man who hath returned me my daughter, whom I had despaired of rescuing—who hath delivered mine enemy into my hands."

"But, indeed, M. le Comte," I said earnestly, "it was not I conceived the plan. I could have done nothing of myself," and I told him the story of the message. "This friend of yours in Roquefort's household is no ordinary man," I added.

"No, he is no ordinary man," assented M. le Comte. "It is not often one secures an agent at once so fearless and so full of resource. 'Tis a strange story, but not mine to tell," and he fell a moment silent. "Still," he continued warmly, "you will at least permit me to give you credit with the execution. I have myself found many times that it is easy to lay a plan; but often I have not succeeded so well in carrying it out."

He turned to where Roquefort lay on the couch. I fancied that I could already discern the death-damp on his brow.

"He must have attention," said M. le Comte, and, raising the curtain, he dispatched a sentry for his surgeon. The surgeon was soon there, and bent over Roquefort with grave face. He wiped the blood from his lips, raised his head, and examined with deft fingers the wound Fronsac's musket had inflicted, then, tearing away his clothing, put his ear against his chest. He listened a moment so, then stood erect again.

"'Tis as I feared, M. le Comte," he said. "The wound in the head is nothing—a glance blow that tore the scalp and produced a slight palsy; but his chest is crushed; he bleeds within. I have seen men so who have fallen beneath their horses, but I have never yet seen one get well again."

"And how long will he live?"

The surgeon shook his head.

"An hour—a day—perhaps two days. One cannot tell. Let us try to bring him back to consciousness."

He bathed face and temples with cold water and forced a glass of wine between his teeth. The dying man groaned—coughed feebly—opened his eyes and saw us.

For a moment he lay without moving, his eyes travelling from face to face. Then they rested on M. le Comte, and a bitter smile curved his lips.

"So—you have won!" he whispered.

"Yes—I have won!" but there was more of pity than triumph in M. le Comte's voice.

Roquefort's eyes rested on him an instant in puzzled inquiry. He did not understand this change of tone. Then his eyes travelled to the surgeon's face.

"Am I done?" he asked. "Is this the end?"

The surgeon bent his head.

"Shall I summon a priest, M. le Duc?" he asked.

Roquefort's eyes grew bright with sudden resolution.

"A priest? Yes! At once!"

But there was no fear of death in his face—he seemed elate, almost joyful. I could not understand it. His face too had taken on a certain dignity it had before been stranger to—the lines of cruelty and harshness had disappeared—he was almost handsome, and his eyes were bright with purpose.

He coughed again, and a spatter of blood came to his lips. The surgeon wiped it away and gave him again of the wine to drink. We could see how it brought warm life back to him.

"M. le Comte," he said, when he could speak again, "I have a favor to ask of you. I am sure you can be a generous enemy—even to me, since I am dying."

"Ask on, M. le Duc," said the other in a softened voice. "What is it?"

"One of your men will take this ring," and he pulled a signet from his finger, "mount to the castle, and show it to the sentry at the outer gate. He will open without question. Your messenger will ask for Claire de Brissac. He will tell her that I lie dying here and wish to see her. She will come, I know. Will you do so much for me, M. le Comte?"

"Aye, and more," came the answer readily, and M. le Comte stooped and took the ring. "It shall be done. I give my word for it."

Roquefort's eyes blazed up with joy; then he lay back wearily upon his pillow. I felt a sudden fear spring to life in my heart. What could he want of Claire? I looked up to find M. le Comte's eyes upon me.

"M. de Marsan," he said, "are you too weary to perform this journey?"

Weary? No! Not when the journey led to Claire! When I should be alone with her, as I had dreamed, with only the stars for company and none to interfere!

"I shall be glad to go, M. le Comte," I said, and took the ring.

"There is need of haste," he added, glancing at the figure on the bed. "Do you wish a companion?"

"A companion? No, Monsieur. They might fire if they saw two men approaching. One they will not fear."

"True. Hasten, then; we will await you here."

I hurried out into the night, across the camp, and around the cliff to the road that mounted to the castle gate. The moon was in mid-heaven, and I could see the road stretching, a white ribbon, ahead of

me. I knew that others, looking down, could see me mounting, and as I went I held my hands high above my head to show that I was on a peaceful errand. So I was permitted to pass without challenge until I stood before the great gate.

"A message from M. le Duc de Roquefort!" I cried.

There was a moment's pause, then I heard the rattle of bolts and a little postern opened.

"Enter!" said a gruff voice.

I stooped and stepped through. The gate was clanged shut behind me in an instant. A mob of men-at-arms crowded threateningly about me.

"M. le Duc is now in the camp of M. le Comte de Cadillac," I began. "He sent this ring by me to prove that I am his messenger. He desires me to bring back to him the body of Mademoiselle Claire de Brissac."

There was a little stir in their ranks.

"What does it mean?" asked one at last. "What wants he of the girl?"

"I do not know," I answered, and I could not wholly keep the bitterness from my voice. "He sent this ring that you might obey his order without question."

They nodded one to another, each placing his construction on the order. Doubtless they were all familiar with their master's passion for her, and so could fashion their own conclusion. Some half dozen of them drew to a corner and talked together in low tones. At last they came back to me.

"You shall have the girl, Monsieur," said one of them, "but you must leave us the ring for warrant."

I handed it over readily enough, and watched him as he hastened across the court and plunged into the dark doorway of the building beyond. The minutes dragged like hours. Would she come? What would she think?

A touch on the arm brought me out of my thoughts. I turned to find myself looking into the face of Roquefort's surgeon—the one who had gazed down upon me on the rack. Again some fancied familiarity in his features struck me, and his voice, when he spoke, made me fairly start, so certain was I that I had heard it somewhere far from Marleon.

"A word with you, M. de Marsan," he said, and drew me deeper into the shadow of the wall. "M. le Duc is injured, is he not?"

I glanced around to see that none could hear.

"These others must not know," I began, "not yet."

"They shall not know."

There was something in his tone that drew my eyes to his face. I saw that it was set as with great suffering. Could it be that he so loved his master?

"M. le Duc is injured," I said, "very badly,—so badly, I fear, he will not live."

"But he still lives?" he demanded eagerly.

"Oh, yes, and will for a day—perhaps two days."

He breathed a great sigh of relief.

"Thank you, M. de Marsan," he said. "I think my place is with him. I shall soon follow you."

He left me abruptly, and I stared after him until the darkness hid him. There was some mystery in his manner I could not penetrate. But I did not ponder it long, for two figures emerged from the doorway opposite and I saw that one was Claire.

She came straight to me.

"What is it, M. de Marsan?" she asked. "What has happened?"

"M. le Duc is injured," I said, so low that the others could not hear. "He is very badly injured—dying, perhaps—and wishes to see you."

"Dying!" she breathed, her face white with horror. "And he was so strong—so full of life! Oh, then I will go! Let us hasten, Monsieur!"

They threw back the postern and in a moment we were without—alone together.

#### XVI.

##### MADAME LA DUCHESSE DE ROQUEFORT

We went down the road together in silence. For a moment my heart revolted at the warmth of Claire's allusion to the man; then I remembered that he was dying, and put the pettiness from me. I longed to speak to her, to take her hand, but I knew that fifty pairs of eyes were watching us from the battlements, and held my peace. But I could look at her—at her great, dark eyes, her red lips, the curls clustering about her neck, her lithe, active, perfect figure, promising even greater charms as the years passed.

She raised her eyes to mine and smiled tremulously at what she saw there.

"How far is this place to which we go, Monsieur?" she asked.

"Not far," I answered. "Would it were all eternity away!"

She smiled again.

"And you would wish to become a second Ahasuerus?" she asked, looking at me archly. "To keep walking thus for all eternity? Surely not?"

"With you!" I cried, all my love in my face.

She turned her eyes away. But as we passed a ledge of rock, where the shadow lay deep upon the road, she stumbled.

I know not how it was—I had thought only to catch her hand—but the touch of her set my blood aflame—she was in my arms, close

against my breast. For an instant she looked up at me, startled; then, with a sigh, she yielded to me and laid her head upon my heart. And I was far past words—far past anything but the deep, tremulous joy of holding her, of gazing down into her eyes. She let me drink deep of them.

"How your heart beats!" she said at last, smiling up at me. "It is just here, under my ear."

"For you, dear life! Every beat of it!"

"And mine for you," she said. "Every beat of it!"

I looked up at the bright heavens—away at the distant hills.

"What is it?" she asked.

"That it should be true!" I said. "I have dreamed of it—longed for it—but that it should be true!"

"It has been true a long time," she answered softly,—"a long time, Paul."

Her voice lingered on the name. It was the first time that I had heard it from her lips.

"But not so long as I," I protested. "I have loved you from the moment I saw you in the Rue Gogard. And you?"

She was smiling up at me with infinite tenderness.

"I have thought of no other man since then," she said.

Again I looked out over the plain. This time the gleam of the camp-fires caught my eyes, and with a start I remembered my errand.

"Sweetheart," I said, summoning all my courage, "we must go down. M. le Comte awaits us. I pledged him I would hasten. M. de Roquefort may even now be dead. He loves you, I think, but not as I!"

"No, not as you!"

She was looking up into my eyes, radiant with love. Never was there other woman like her.

Yet we lingered for a time, as our parents must have lingered at the gate of Eden. But at last we had reached the plain, and made our way to the camp and to the tent of M. le Comte.

They were awaiting us. Roquefort seemed much stronger. He was supported on a pile of pillows, and but for the fever-glare in his eyes would not have appeared ill. The eyes brightened as we entered and a vivid flush sprang to either cheek.

"Come hither, Claire!" he cried, and she went to him, radiant in her loveliness. Even he seemed startled by it, and gazed at her a moment without speaking.

"I have come to the end of the path, Claire," he said at last. "They tell me I may live a day, perhaps—no longer. And before the end I am going to ask you to keep a pledge you made me. See, I have kept mine"—and he made a little gesture towards me—"as far as in me lay."



Not till then did I understand, and my heart grew cold at thought of it.

"You know I have loved you, Claire," he went on, looking up into her eyes. "Nay, do not speak—do not protest! I have loved you! Had I not—had I not hungered for your love in return—I should have made you mine long ere this. But now, at the end, you must be mine! You have already promised, Claire! You cannot break your promise to a dying man!"

He paused—a cough choked him—and again there was blood upon his lips. I trembled to hurl myself upon him—to drag her away—but what could I say?—what plea could I offer? Oh, why did not she herself answer him?

But she did not answer—she did not draw away, as I, who stood there with starting eyes, watching her every movement, thought she must. She only knelt with her face buried in the cushions, shaken by sobs. But pity could go too far!

"You cannot deny a dying man, Claire," he repeated in a fainter voice, and I saw how little his strength was. "It means more to me than you can guess. I am dying without issue—without heir. I want Roquefort to be yours, Claire. It must not go to that scoundrel in Valladolid."

I remembered Fronsac's story of his hate for his next of kin, and ceased to wonder at him. But she—she—why did not she put him from her? I know the price would tempt most women, yet I had not thought it would tempt her. But a moment since she had told me—there!—why recall it? For now she stood suddenly upright and looked down into his eyes quite calmly.

"If you really wish it, M. le Duc," she said. "If you think it will make you happier, I am ready!"

He lifted her hand to his lips—he forgot that he was looking in the face of death. Oh, I could have slain him—could have slain them both! What a fool was I to trust a woman's word! And what a fool would I yet be should I betray myself!

But I had need for all my self-control. They brought in the priest, and Roquefort, in two words, gained his consent. They hastened after stole and surplice; Claire knelt at the bedside, her hand in his—a great silence fell upon the tent. And then the voice of the priest began the service, shortened somewhat to fit this strange occasion. My heart stood still as he came to the responses—I hoped madly that Claire might yet refuse, but her voice was the stronger of the two.

They pressed forward to kiss the hand of Madame la Duchesse de Roquefort,—mistress of a demesne second only to that of M. le Comte himself,—but I did not stay to witness it. Sick at heart—cursing woman's baseness—I went blindly forth into the night.

## XVII.

## A TEN YEARS' VENGEANCE

I OPENED my eyes to find Fronsac looking down at me. For an instant I thought myself still at the cliff-foot, but a glance told me I was in bed, in a room that, till then, I had never seen.

"You know me!" he cried. "You know me! Tell me, Marsan, you know me!"

"Of course I know you, Fronsac," I answered petulantly, and stopped, astonished at the effort the words cost me. "I have been ill!" I cried.

"Very ill," he said, "but you are past danger now, thank God! There, think no more about it."

He had no need to command me, for my brain seemed so numb it could not think. I remember perhaps a dozen such intervals of dim consciousness. Always there was Fronsac bending over me, and sometimes I fancied there was another in the room, who whisked away at the first sign of my awakening.

A third face too there was. At first I did not know it, but stared stupidly up at it—and then, at last, I recognized Briquet, the surgeon of M. le Duc. For a moment my blood ran cold to see him standing so, for I thought myself again upon the rack. But a second glance dispelled my terror. His face had changed. Stern it still was, but no longer lined by hate, and the eyes were almost gentle. How different from the coals of fire that had glared at Roquefort! I was too weary to seek the clue to the change, which I marvelled at without in the least understanding.

But one morning it was different. I awoke strong, refreshed, my mind quite clear. It was like the dawn breaking over the hilltop, sweeping the valley clear of mist.

Fronsac brought me meat and drink, which I welcomed eagerly, for I was tortured with a great hunger. And as I ate I remembered it all again—the escape, the journey to the castle, the scene in the tent, with the priest's voice droning the service. Even yet I could not understand it—that a woman should break her word like that—and she had loved me—yes, I was quite sure that she had loved me. But of a sudden there had been dangled before her face the coronet of a duchesse—the wide lands and lofty castle of Roquefort—and she had seized the bait. Yet it had been offered her before and she had shrunk away. From month to month she had refused it, only to grasp it at this last desperate moment. I could not understand. Perhaps she had been only playing with him; perhaps it was the sight of him lying helpless there that had moved her. In any event, there was but one course for me. I must put her out of my heart. She was now on the mountain-top, I in the valley; she was Madame la Duchesse de Roquefort, I but Paul de Mar-

san, with no fortune but what my sword might win me. At the end I turned to Fronsac.

"Now, my friend," I said, pushing the food away, "you must tell me everything—everything that has happened since that night."

"Are you strong enough?" he asked, hesitating.

"Strong enough?" and I laughed, for the wine had put new life into me. "I shall be out of bed to-morrow. By the way, where am I?"

"You are in a room of the castle of Madame la Duchesse de Roquefort."

He saw the flush that leaped to my face, and smiled.

"Does that surprise you? The morning after the wedding you were found roaming about the walls quite mad. The exertion of the night before had been too much for you, it seems, and your hands were in a horrible state. We, who were thinking only of ourselves, did not think of you. You should have heard Valérie! Well, Madame la Duchesse insisted that you be brought straight here, and here you have since remained."

"And you with me," I added gratefully. "It must have been a trying task. I can imagine your self-denial, my friend."

"Nonsense!" he interrupted hastily. "It were little to do for the man who saved my life—and more. Besides, it was not only I."

I looked at him with questioning eyes.

"Briquet," he said, "did more than I. He seems to have a great interest in you. He is a strange man."

I pondered over this for a time.

"I do not know," I said at last. "I fancy sometimes that we have met before, far from Marleon, and yet I cannot be certain."

"But I have other news," and Fronsac looked at me, his face crimson with happiness. "About Valérie and myself."

I understood, and held out my hand to him.

"Yes," he said, "M. le Comte has given his consent. We will be married so soon as I can take you with me to Cadillac."

I pressed his hand with sincere warmth.

"Then, indeed, I must hasten to get well!" I cried. "To think that I should be keeping you apart!"

"You have not kept us apart," he protested. "It was you brought us together. Valérie warned me not to approach her until I could bring you with me—I swear, I am almost jealous of you, Marsan! The troop has heard the story of the escape—you will see how they will welcome you! M. le Comte himself remained until he was certain you were out of danger. You have quite won his heart, my friend."

I felt my lips trembling.

"And after that scar!" I murmured.

"Yes, after the scar! Think, I have even seen him kissing the

hand that inflicted it—for he has taken Madame la Duchesse to his heart also. Well, I am glad, for she has need of a protector.”

He read in my eyes the question which I dared not ask.

“Roquefort died an hour after the wedding,” he said. “Do you know, Marsan, I fancy we never did him justice. He proved a man at the last!”

Yes, he proved a man at the last! It is a man’s part to win—and he had won!

“He died alone,” continued Fronsac, “alone, but for his surgeon. Briquet came to the tent almost before the wedding was concluded, and insisted on remaining at his master’s side. Madame la Duchesse thought her place, also, was there. Roquefort had dropped asleep, worn out by the excitement of the evening, and it seemed certain that he would sleep till morning. A couch was brought for her, and she lay down, leaving Briquet to watch the sleeper. Scarcely had she closed her eyes, when a loud cry startled her awake. Roquefort was sitting upright in the bed, the blood pouring from his mouth, staring in terror at Briquet, who was calmly wiping it away. Death caught him with that look still on his face—it was not good to see. There were some whispers that Briquet had interfered, but M. le Comte shut them off. He seemed to understand.

“So I fancy there is an end to the feud between Cadillac and Roquefort,” he added, smiling. “The cousin from Valladolid has been sent about his business, swearing great oaths. Madame la Duchesse has already set about readjusting the rentals and rebuilding her peasants’ huts. They idolize her! There is a woman! What a duchesse she makes!”

I could picture her to myself—she were worthy to mate with a king—to give a nation its rulers!

“You are weary,” he said, seeing that I did not reply. “I have been running on without a thought of your condition! What a nurse I am! There, you must sleep,” and without heeding my protests he gathered up the dishes and left the room, closing the door behind him.

But I could not sleep. My brain was full of what he had told me. I saw Madame la Duchesse de Roquefort moving like a queen among her vassals. There existed no longer Claire, the sweet, simple, ingenuous girl I had known, new to the world, fresh from the convent—there was now only the great lady. M. le Comte himself, great as he was, had been proud to bend his head and kiss her hand. Who was great enough, strong enough, bold enough, to aspire to her lips? Well, I would still love the girl—I would hold her locked in my heart—the great lady would go her way. And I thought of her as she had been on that last night of all—I felt again her warm, sweet body in my arms—I gazed again into her eyes and saw love there—I heard again her voice—

"And mine for you! Every beat of it!" God! And a moment later she had fallen!

It was long before I slept, but tired nature asserted herself at last, and it was not until another morning dawned that she lifted her weights from off my eyes. This time it was Briquet I found at my bedside, and I noted again how his face had softened and grown human. He smiled as he saw my eyes on his.

"You are better," he said. "It is easy to see that. You will soon be quite well."

Again the voice—where had I heard it? I must penetrate this mystery.

"M. Briquet," I began, "my friend has told me how deeply I am indebted to your care, and I wish to thank you. But have we not met before?"

"I should not think you would forget it," he answered readily. "I was called to attend d'Aurilly—and you."

"Yes—I know," I said impatiently. "But before that?"

He hesitated a moment, then drew from his pocket a small book, tore out a strip of paper, and wrote upon it a rapid sentence.

"I am quite willing that you should know," he said. "In fact, I believed that you already knew," and held the paper before my eyes.

"Monsieur," I read, "I have learned of your demeanor at the question, and am grateful, for I am he who brought the warning to Marsan."

There could be no mistaking the handwriting, and I looked at him amazed.

"It was you, then," I stammered,—“you.”

"Yes, I. Looking up at me from the rack, I thought you knew me."

"No," I said, still looking at him wonderingly. "I could not place you. I did not suspect——"

"That I could be a spy, a traitor?" and he laughed, with some of the old look back upon his face. "Let me tell you the story, Monsieur; perhaps you will no longer wonder. My father lived at Lembeye, and managed to save some money. He determined that I should have a career, and so sent me to Paris to become a student of medicine. That was ten years ago, and I came back to my home to find it desecrated. M. le Duc de Roquefort had ridden through the town at the head of his ruffians. As he passed our gate, he saw my sister standing there, a pretty girl of seventeen, fresh as the dawn, with brown eyes that were always laughing. Without checking his horse, he leaned down and swung her to the saddle before him."

He paused and passed his hand before his eyes, as though to blot out a vision.

"It was done in an instant," he went on at last. "My father could



do nothing. He could only stand and watch her carried away, screaming, struggling, with those other devils looking on and laughing. It was then that I came home. I had been away for four years. No one knew me. I buried my old self and started to find my sister. I found her here at Marleon, Monsieur; you can guess in what condition! The child killed her,—she was happy to die,—and I buried them together. There was nothing left but my vengeance. I thought at first to kill him—but that was so poor a way! I gained entrance to his household, first as a man-at-arms, then as his physician. I won his confidence, only to betray it; he told me his plans and had them come to naught. Cadillac at first refused to trust me, but I told him my story, and I have served him well,—how well you will never guess, Monsieur, nor in how many ways I tortured this monster. And at the end I told him—he died looking at me.”

He stopped. I could find nothing to say. I gazed at him, fascinated.

“Now it is over,” he said. “Now there will be room in my life for other things than hate. I shall go back to Paris. I have waited here only to see you out of danger, M. de Marsan. You are out of danger now,” and he held out his hand. “Adieu.”

I took his hand in mine and pressed it. I could find no blame for him in my heart.

“Adieu, Monsieur,” I said, “and again thanks for your kindness.”

“I mean to devote my life to it,” he said simply, “so much of my life as is left to me,” and he was gone almost before the words were spoken.

I lay for long looking at the door, pondering on his story. What a vengeance! To play traitor to a man for long years—to seem his friend and yet to hate him—and then, at the end, to lay the treachery bare before him! I understood now, as M. le Comte had done, that look of terror in Roquefort’s eyes, and found it in my heart to pity him.

#### XVIII.

#### LIGHT!

THE day passed without further incident. I took a turn about the room on Fronsac’s arm and found that my strength was fast returning. I ate the food that he brought me, and lay staring at the ceiling till drowsiness overtook me. Yet, despite myself, I was not content. More than once I caught myself listening for I know not what—a light step in the corridor, the rustle of a dress, the sound of a voice—expecting the door to open and show Claire there. What a fool I was! What time had she for me? She was busy with the affairs of her duchy—a great lady!

Night came at last, and darkness, bringing sleep with it. Dawn found me strong, refreshed. I arose and walked about the room, and



though my legs still trembled somewhat, I was certain that once on horseback I should be quite myself. I was determined to leave Marleon as soon as might be—a horror of the place possessed me.

Fronsac found me dressed, and I lost no time in announcing my wish to set out with him for Cadillac.

"But you are not strong enough," he urged. "Let us wait. There is no cause for haste."

"If Mademoiselle Valérie heard you say that!" I laughed. "I can see her awaiting you in that arbor by the river's edge."

"So it is for my sake!" he said.

"No, it is not for your sake, my friend," I answered earnestly. "At least, not wholly. I am itching to leave this place. There is no quiet for me here."

He looked at me for a moment questioningly, but I did not meet his eyes. My secret must remain my own.

"Very well," he said quietly at last, "since you wish it, we will set out to-day. I will inform Madame la Duchesse. You will doubtless wish to thank her for her kindness."

"Yes," I answered thickly. "Yes."

It would try my strength to set eyes on her again—to speak to her. But I was a man, thank God! I could hide my heart!

Yet when at last we stood before her, I forgot my injured pride in the joy of seeing her—the calm brow, the dark eyes, the arching mouth, the white hand, and the swell of the arm lost in the lace above. What a woman! No longer the girl fresh from the convent—the fine lady! A duchesse—a queen!

"And so you are leaving us, M. de Marsan?" she asked at last.

Her voice brought me back to myself—she on the hilltop, I in the valley.

"Yes, I am leaving, Madame," I said. "I am quite well again, and my friend here is hungering for Cadillac and those that await him there."

Her face changed, and she sat gazing at me in silence for a moment. There was that in her eyes—but there!—why be, a second time, a fool?

"You do not seem well," she said. "Nor strong. Are you quite sure you can bear the journey?"

"Quite sure, Madame."

She made a little gesture of impatience.

"I have to thank you, Madame," I added, "for your kindness in receiving me here. It was very foolish of me to be ill."

"Very foolish," she agreed, looking at me again. "Very foolish. I do not think you realize how foolish. I had thought you a man of wit, M. de Marsan, but I find you very dense!"

I flushed at the words, but dared not look at her. I must go, or I

should be upon my knees before her, a beggar for her slightest favor. I glanced at Fronsac, who stood with folded arms, frowning deeply.

"Adieu, then, Madame," I said.

She held out her hand to me. I knelt and kissed it, not daring to look up into her face; remembering, with a great rush of tenderness, the times I had already kissed it. I was aflame to snatch her to me, to assert my claim to her, to kiss her arms, her neck, her lips, to ask her if she had forgot that scene in the moonlight—

"M. de Fronsac," she was saying, "listen—I have a little story I wish you to hear. You, M. de Marsan, remain where you are. There was once a girl taken suddenly from a convent, where she had spent her whole life, and planted in the midst of a turbulent court. The ruler of the court looked on her with lustful eyes, yet had the honor to offer her his title. But she heard strange tales of him which frightened her, and at last she saw another, nearer her own age, who seemed to her the very rose of gallantry and courage. So she put away from her all thought of the other, and at last—one night—her lover claimed her. But the other lay dying. He was lord of wide lands and of a proud title. These, he said, he wanted her to have, even at this last moment, when their marriage must be one unconsummated. And as she knelt beside his bed, listening to him in patience, for she remembered he was dying, of a sudden the thought came to her—why not take these things for her lover? Oh, it would be a joy to give him place and power—more than her mere self! Why not give him these also?"

She paused for a moment—her voice was trembling so. I could not look up—I dared not, lest my eyes be blinded.

"You will pardon me, M. de Fronsac, if I tell the story very badly," she said, with a little, unsteady laugh. "But it moves me greatly, for her lover did not understand. He fancied she desired place and wealth for herself, when it was alone for him. He did not comprehend the greatness of her love. He was stricken with fever—and as, night after night, she listened to him in his delirium, she knew that it was her fault—that she had driven him mad—and her heart grew cold with fear that he might not get well. But he did get well—he came to her to say good-by—he closed his eyes to all she had intended, to all she let him see. He wrapped himself about with his pride, which he fancied had been injured, and would not look at her. What think you of such a man, M. de Fronsac?"

"I think him a fool!" said Fronsac savagely.

But I did not heed him. I was looking up, up into her eyes. And I read there the same story they had told me once before. There could be no mistaking!

"Claire!" I cried,—*"Claire!"*

And she, in her great love and strength, stooped and raised me to the seat beside her.

# AVOWALS

BEING THE FIRST OF A NEW SERIES OF  
"CONFESSIONS OF A YOUNG MAN"

*By George Moore*

*Author of "The Untilled Field," "Evelyn Innes," etc.*



EVERY author returns to criticism when he is weary of original work, and I think I have earned the right to an æsthetic holiday. Six years ago I began "Evelyn Innes," and there are four hundred and fifty pages in that novel. I had to put the novel aside to write "The Bending of the Bough" for the Irish Literary Theatre, "and when that job of work was done I finished "Evelyn Innes," and then I wrote "Sister Teresa," and there are two hundred and sixty pages in that novel. Then I had to write another play for the Irish Literary Theatre, "Diarmuid and Grania." This play, written in collaboration with Mr. Yeats, is founded on the celebrated legend of the lovers who fled for seven years from Finn "along Ireland and across Ireland and from kingdom to kingdom."

Now, the filling of so many pages with words is not an inconsiderable labor, but the length of the texts is only a little difficulty in comparison with the great difficulty,—the assimilation of moral atmospheres. I had to write "Sister Teresa" many times before I acquired the conventual atmosphere; two years had to pass before I could kneel with a nun in prayer; and this sloughing off of one's ordinary self, this acquisition of new thoughts, new feelings, new ideals, new modes of expression, has often caused me to wonder, and I have often stayed a moment on the convent threshold looking back and forward.

Following close upon these voluntary changes of moral nature there came a real change, a revolution of feelings and ideas never experienced by me before. The England that I had loved always became hateful,—every English aspect,—and the ideals that had inspired me fell and crumbled away. The change came stealthily. I remember the first time I noticed it. I stood under an autumn sky, a tumult of purple and flying gold; and looking across a wooded park I saw the Burran mountains through a vista, masses of rocky hills; the blue gloom drew the landscape into a beautiful picture, and I perceived a pathetic beauty in the poor Irish country that I had not perceived before.

The seed was sown that autumn evening, but it was not till three

months after that I began to loathe England, and to hate the war, and to feel that I could not live among people who thought right all that I thought wrong, who indulged in such miserable lying and self-deception the moment it was their interest to do so. That is how I felt then. I know now that the English acted neither better nor worse than any other people. I have learned that every people would have acted as the English acted. I have learned, alas! that morality is a myth. The mythical character of morality will form the subject of another article—the purpose of these lines is to tell a few facts about myself which will introduce, and I hope agreeably, the many various æsthetical and moral views that have perplexed and interested me for the last few years.

◆

In the seventies France called me from Ireland, and in 1902 I listened for the call again. France called me but faintly; Ireland called me loudly from England. I waited for France to call me again; I stood listening between the old love and the new—hesitations between the decadent and the crescent passion are but subterfuges—and the temptation to return to my own country overcame me. I yielded to the rustic beauty, seeing charms in her Gaelic face that I had not seen twenty years before. Was not my country engaged in the perilous and fascinating artistic adventure of a language revival? The English language, I argued, has been spoken and written so much that it is no longer fit for literary use. The dialects are extinct, and the language is divided into the formal and colorless idiom of the educated classes and the debased idiom of Whitechapel. I saw in the Irish language a new literary medium; it interested me as a new musical instrument interests a musician. But I could not spend the whole of my time admiring an instrument I could not play, advising peasants—the future progenitors of our literature—to speak a language not one single word of which I knew. A man of letters must write; as well advise silence to the singing-bird as to ask the man of letters to become a language agitator or a proselytizer. I had to write. “The atmosphere,” I said, “is within me. I shall not experience the difficulty I experienced with ‘Sister Teresa,’ and I’m weary of the long novel—I will write stories about peasants and priests!” I composed one, but before writing I told it to a friend walking through Rathmines, and he said that if I were to write a book about Ireland it would be a book of recollections verified by observation. The reason he gave impressed me. “The best literature,” I said, “is memories verified by observation.” On such little accidents as these are books begotten. When I returned home I wrote the story, “Julia Cahill’s Curse,” and then I wrote another, and now they are all written and published, and I am behoven to heave up the burden of a long novel on my shoulders. But souls are heavy burdens

and a critical frolic tempts me; contemporary literary opinion needs poking up, the eternal altars have been neglected. I will lay a few fresh wreaths upon them.

I said in "The Untilled Field" that every nation has its special genius. It is clear that the genius of Germany has manifested itself in music. Goethe and Heine have produced beautiful poems, but there was little literature before Goethe and Heine, and there has been very little since, whereas the musical tradition has never ceased—Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Wagner; and to-day Richard Strauss occupies the first place in modern music. We could spare Goethe better than Beethoven and Purcel better than—shall I say Keats? We certainly could spare Turner better than Shakespeare, and why? because neither painting nor music is England's special genius. Her special genius is poetry, and her poetical tradition is as unbroken as the musical tradition in Germany. In the sixteenth century Spenser was the greatest poet in the world, and there can be no doubt that Swinburne is to-day the greatest living poet. The English language and the English mind seem to go into verse instinctively, and English prose, though partaking of some of the beauties of English verse, occupies but a subaltern place in English literature. English prose may be compared to English painting. Reynolds, Gainsborough, Turner—select what fourth name you like—Moreland or Cotman or Millais, are comparable to Landor, Pater, De Quincey—select what fourth name you like—Carlyle or Newman or Ruskin. There is so much beauty in English painting and in English prose that we do not like to think of either as a devigation. But we must admit that English prose and English painting are minor manifestations of English genius. It would be better to cast out any four prose writers than to cast out Milton, Shelley, Keats, and Wordsworth. Let all go rather than lose one of these—it amounts to that or very nearly. However this may be, it is certain that the best English writers are historians and essayists. No one would think of replacing one of the five by a novelist, and as fiction is the province of prose writing, which it is the purpose of this article to debate, it may be as well to say at once that there is as little good fiction in England as there is good painting in Germany. German picture-galleries are like Mudie's catalogues, a profusion of works but no names. It is certain that no man writing fiction has ever written with such seriousness of purpose as Carlyle or Ruskin, Landor or Pater. Even Tennyson stands higher than Scott or Thackeray; and though by choice a domestic poet, Tennyson still enjoyed the freedom which has always been the right of the English poet. He tried to give up his freedom, but he could not give up a heritage of more than three hundred years. Fielding and Scott and Thackeray were merely writers



whose ambitions were to while away the leisured afternoons of young ladies on drawing-room sofas and the leisured evenings of old gentlemen in their armchairs after dinner. The long tradition of English poetry is that the heart of life is the real substance, whereas the tradition of the English novel, a tradition of about one hundred and fifty years, is that the novelist should skim lightly, respecting the moral and religious prejudices of his time. This was the law, and those who wanted freedom wrote in verse. Lord Byron probably would have given us better things than "Beppo" or "The Vision of Judgment," perhaps even better than "Don Juan," if he had written in prose. If he had written in prose, we certainly would have been saved such amateur bunglings as "The Bride of Abydos" and the "Siege of Corinth." But it was not because he feared to shock the prejudice of the English drawing-room or the smoking-room that he did not write prose romances; he wrote in verse because verse has been considered the legitimate vehicle of thought from Spenser down to the present day.



Here I will interrupt my literary discourse in order that I may take credit for having liberated the English novel. When I first appeared on the scene the English novel was published in three volumes at thirty-one shillings and sixpence. It was therefore entirely in the power of the librarians. If they did not take a book, the book ceased; no one would buy a book in three volumes at thirty-one and sixpence, therefore no one wrote anything in a novel that it was thought the librarians might object to. But I did, and my first novel, "A Modern Lover," was rejected by the librarians, and after a conversation with one of the librarians I understood that I should have to undo the bondage of the librarians or write according to the fashion of the time. I decided to undo the bondage of the librarians and published "A Mummer's Wife" at six shillings.

Having claimed my due, I pose the question, Why is it that England has failed to produce a first-class work of fiction? It is refreshing to ask these questions, they lead into pleasant meads of meditation, and this is not the first time I have mused in these meads. I remember trying once before to answer this question, and I pointed out that the tragedies of Shakespeare were every one the development of a moral idea, that "Hamlet" was but the tragedy of doubt, that "Macbeth" was the tragedy of ambition, that Lear was the tragedy of parental altruism. "A nation," I said, "is interested in moral ideas in its infancy. As a nation grows old it becomes interested in discriminating between the different classes, the grocer and the baronet, the Methodist and the Unitarian; if the author is an American, between Americans who go to Paris and Americans who stay at home. As a nation grows old its language becomes polluted. In the beginning language is like a well-



head from which all may draw pure water. The well passes into a rivulet, the rivulet flows into a river, the river passes through the town, and henceforth the water must be passed through a filter. Style is the filter that a language that has been much written in must be passed through. Milton was the first stylist.

The English novel was invented after the great period when men were interested in moral ideas. The prose tale appeared in England when social life had reached its highest point, in the middle of the eighteenth century, and the first novel seems to have dictated the character that the English novel has preserved to the present day. As we read "Tom Jones" we see that Fielding looked upon the novel as a less serious form of literature than poetry, and that his intention in writing "Tom Jones" was to provide drawing-room amusement. The attitude he adopts is that of an entertainer; the entertainer's tone of voice is heard at once, and the story is furnished with social types so obvious that the most casual can understand. There is a man called Allworthy, and the name indicates the author's æstheticism, and there is a squire who is only what country squires are supposed to be, a rough man with a taste for hunting and port wine. Sophia is an unsullied white dress. Tom Jones has a nice eye for lasses, and he is always ready for a fight—a bull terrier and nothing more. There is a fashionable lady, and nothing is known about her except that she once took Tom Jones into her drawing-room. There are little homilies, and it is impossible to imagine any writing more trite than these. Out of what depth of life do they speak? Out of what depth of life does the book speak? By this question, and by this question only, can we discriminate between good and bad art. If we go on and apply this test to all novelists writing in English, we find that none has spoken out of a deeper depth than the first plummet sounded.

At the beginning of the century there was a woman who wrote very nicely, and it was her genius to conclude the English novel on the lines already laid down by Fielding. Whereas in Fielding there is some animal passion and many humorous incidents, Miss Austen's genius is to describe manners with patience, to discuss the order in which ladies should enter a carriage, and every kind of social distinction. I think I can see her sitting at her desk writing out her staid little pages while her sister is working a tapestry screen at the fireplace. The literature and the needlework are painstaking and conventional. Whatever merits either has is obtained by a strict obedience to convention. Great art is always licentious (I use the word in its grammatical meaning). The great artist, like the prophet, is a law to himself; but some little beauty and quaintness is obtained by obeying convention, and the men and the women that Jane Austen writes are as prim and as moral as the strangely colored flowers and the dogs that her sister stitches on the screens. The domestic mask is never lifted. We read on until a great

fear seizes us, and we wonder at last what these demure men and women do when they leave Highbury and go up to London, what crimes they commit; and her admirable reticence on these points almost justifies us in considering Jane Austen as a tragic writer.

After her came the pompous and garrulous Scott, and after him the facile and commonplace Thackeray, who did no more than dress up the Fielding novel in modest Victorian clothes—long drawers and crinolines, wide trousers and whiskers. In one of his books there is an adventuress,—and a very Victorian adventuress she is,—a governess who marries into an aristocratic family and about whom the author only tells us that her intimate friend is a lord and that he makes her presents of jewelry; he knows a little about her external life, but he does not know if she be a cold or a sensual woman, and the first gift of the adventuress is sensuality. Shakespeare had no doubt about that, nor had Balzac.

Thackeray's mind was very second-class. The ambition of first-class society is to shuffle off restraint and to become vulgar; the effort is factitious, but it is an aspiration towards liberty; in second-class society we meet no such aspiration, only worn-out conventions and mincing manners. Thackeray was like his name—second class. What an air of gentility the syllables exhale. Thackeray! If he had not written a line we could easily imagine the "satire" such a name would write about young ladies who wished to be married, drawing-room satire, gentle ridicule at every little peculiarity that may be laughed at with propriety in the drawing-room. He was a contemporary of Charles Dickens, and Charles Dickens's writings are as like his name as Thackeray's are like his. If they did nothing else, both men have produced a literature worthy of their names. Who but Charles Dickens could have written "Dombey and Son" and Sam Weller, and the horrible quotation, "Beware of widows, Sammy"? If these works were anonymous, I can imagine some great æsthetician deducing from them the name of the author. Balzac would have invented the name. Charles Dickens! Who else could have written the story of the man who went to Paris to be guillotined for somebody else? Who could have invented Bill Sykes and Nancy? for, notwithstanding her chum, Nancy is as unreal as Traviata. As a writer he ranks as high as Donizetti, Bellini—perhaps Verdi.

After Dickens come a number of women, and I am sure that someone is itching to remind me of George Eliot, and someone else is itching to remind me that the Brontës wrote "*Jane Eyre*" and "*Wuthering Heights*." Someone else, I am sure, is thinking of Mrs. Gaskell. Well, life is long and editors of magazines are patient, and all these novelists might be analyzed and dissected, but my object, I am afraid, is merely to affirm rather than to argue, and as well here as elsewhere I may say my few words about women.

They are very unlike men. The gentle cow is unlike the heavy architectural bull, the horned stag is unlike the foolish long-eared hind, but I know of no animal in which the sexes are so distinctly differentiated as in mankind. The male animal seems to us more beautiful than the female in every kind but our own. We have doubted the beauty of women very little. De Musset said that most of woman's beauty existed in man's love of her, and sometimes I have thought that perhaps De Musset was right, and that, set free from human desire, we should see woman as a small, weakly creature, ridiculously shapen, with big hips and sloping shoulders, comparable neither for strength nor beauty with the wide-shouldered, lank-loined, bearded creature she follows, and whose dinner she cooks inadequately. But if savage woman is inferior to savage man, civilization has made amends for original defects and redesigned her incomparable and dainty, delicate, subtle, and rhythmical, with a little, voluted ear and hair abundant and odorous.

Our concern is with the mental rather than physical woman, but mentality is dependent on physical structure. Woman is beautiful in detail and she excels in detail, but she never attains synthesis, for she herself is not synthesis. Every generation pours thousands of women into the art schools, and after a few years they marry and art is forgotten. Such was the fate of Jane. I cannot trust myself to tell you Jane's story, you must hear it from Tonks. The moment of Tonks's life is when he stretches out his long legs in front of the fire and says: "Jane destroyed all belief in women as artists. I am paid to teach them, and I teach them, but believe in their artistic future, no, not after Jane's failure." Jane was a Slade pupil for three years, and was spoken of as a genius in all our conversations. It was contended that she would darken Rembrandt's glory. No one knew exactly what Jane would do, but we were sure she would do something. Tonks looked upon her as Catholics look upon the Virgin, as one who would intercede for him if his own art failed, she would give him an immortality by proxy. But Jane's marriage overthrew his immortal hopes, and now she draws to please her little boy.

Women like art till the more serious concerns of life begin for them, and George Eliot, who had no babies, continued to stir a sticky porridge all her life long, a substance compounded of rationalism and morality without God, which has been swallowed by all serious critics. A little ray of light has fallen. "Romola" is admitted to be a dull book, but the dark things will not surrender all their mistakes at once, they cling to "Scenes from Clerical Life." If we're wrong about that, Heaven help us! For no man is great enough to admit that he is soulless, that he has no right to exist, that it were better if he had not been born.

Women have succeeded better in painting than in novel-writing.

Madame Morizot made an exquisite and beautiful adaptation of the art of Manet; she carried the art of Manet across her fan, and in doing so she invented an art for herself, and her paintings will always delight those who can appreciate good painting. And then there is Mrs. Browning, who wrote exquisite marginal notes to her husband's poetry. But when women try to think or to construct, their literature becomes sexless, it becomes nondescript, and one does not know whether to compare Daniel Deronda to an ox or a mule. The delicious and exquisite sex is not notable for philosophers or for artists, but for queens and courtesans. It is said that women have succeeded as queens. I am not a historian and cannot argue that point. Women have certainly succeeded as actresses and as courtesans,—yes, and as saints; best of all as saints; they have worshipped worthily the Gods that men created.



My pen pauses, and I ask, What is the theme of this article? That English novelists are not as great as English poets, that their writings are base and mercenary? Surely everyone knows this. Everyone knows that the four novelists I have named nor any four that can be named, speak out of the same depth of life as Tennyson, Browning, Poe, and Swinburne. Again my pen pauses; it seems I cannot get away from the obvious, and yet no critic has said that fiction is the art that has been practised in England with better pecuniary and worse artistic result than other art, English sculpture, of course, excepted; sculpture is a question of latitude, and it has never got farther north than Paris.

But the fiction of other nations is not inferior to their poetry or their painting or their sculpture. The fiction of the great French novelist is not inferior to any French poetry, nor, do I think, even inferior to English poetry. It were better to lose Goethe than to lose Beethoven, but I suppose it would be better to lose Balzac than to lose Shakespeare. The plays are more beautiful than the novels, and beauty is the first quality in a work of art. But there is a great deal of beauty in Balzac, and the vision of Balzac and the energy of Balzac are equal to the vision and energy of Shakespeare. For vision, energy, and various and unceasing imagination "The Human Comedy" is the greatest prose work in the world. If the test—out of what depth of life does a book speak?—be accepted, Balzac is as great as Shakespeare, and we have to take the extent of Balzac into consideration. In speaking of Balzac and Shakespeare one thinks of seas or of mountains. The Balzacian sea is certainly wider, but is it deeper than the Shakespearean? Perhaps the Shakespearean sea is deeper in places; there are deeper pools in Shakespeare, perhaps. I remember a prose poem in which two mountains speak to each other after intervals of ten thousand years.

There is the same profusion in Balzac as there is in Shakespeare,

and how splendid profusion is in a writer! Balzac and Shakespeare seem a profusion of light, an extraordinary radiation. Did Balzac not write "Droll Stories" because someone told him that he did not write French well, and he said, "I'll write a volume of stories in old French in the very origin of the language." And having written ten stories, he wrote twenty; and having written twenty, he wrote thirty, and everyone a miracle of wit. In these stories treating on the lightest subjects, galants and their mistresses for the most part, the great mind of Balzac is revealed as clearly as the mind of Shakespeare is revealed in the scene between the gravediggers in "Hamlet" or in the eating of the leek in "Henry the Fifth." Everywhere we rejoice, and we rejoice continuously, in a mind free from prejudice and conventions. Balzac was not the dupe of titles when he devoted a page and a half to a duchess's armorial bearings. He stood apart smiling at life. The smile was not so sad nor so ironical as Shakespeare's, but it was a beautiful smile, the smile of France, and sometimes he burst into laughter, and his laughter was the laughter of Touraine.

Balzac and Hugo were the last of the great men whose inspiration was unceasing, and who did not make literature but who were literature. Balzac wrote a great story at a sitting: a sitting that lasted for eighteen hours. All that while he wrote, for no secretary could keep pace with him, and all that while he lived on black coffee. Then he slept for thirty hours. Hugo wrote "Hernani" in a month, and we can think of Balzac and Hugo as we think of the great Venetian living in the glory and exultation of constant creation. Veronese must have improvised "The Marriage Feast at Cana" with extraordinary ease, and I like to think he painted the immortal fiddler in a morning and went out in his gondola in the afternoon, thinking he had done a fair day's work. That was how men wrote and painted in the great times before science beckoned them away from the beautiful.

Balzac gathered literature everywhere, in the obscurest corners, like Shakespeare. He turned dross into gold, like Shakespeare. He was the mouthpiece of his age, like Shakespeare. He took from everyone, like Shakespeare, and never heeded the charge of plagiarism. Gautier must have written the sonnet in "Lost Illusions." I will lay my head on the block if it were not Gautier who wrote the sonnet to the Tulip.

"Mais la nature, hélas! n'a pas versé d'odeur  
Dans son calice fait comme un vase de chine."

"Dans son calice fait comme un vase de chine," that is Gautier's line or it is the devil's. And Gautier must have written the description of the studio in "Le Chef d'Ouvre Inconnu." The twisted columns and the oriental lamps are certainly Pasha Gautier's.

I am thinking now how much better I like Balzac's profusion than



Flaubert's constipations. The other day I read "Madame Bovary," and it seemed merely a reasonable, terribly reasonable, an artistic book written by a very intelligent man. The novel passes for being the only well-written novel. Alas! it appeared to me badly written—in other words, it appeared to me to be *written*. Ah, yes, *written*, *written* everywhere. Its music is the music of the pianola, and the pianola is played so skillfully at times that one thinks one detects human fingers here and there. Flaubert was not a novelist, he was a philosopher, a cynic, and a great writer, and he found his genius in "L'Education Sentimentale," and, above all, in that book of satire of "Bouvard and Pécuchet."

The novels of the brothers Goncourt stand on a higher intellectual plane than the work of any English novelist. They contain many beautiful things, but it is not probable that I shall speak of them in these articles. I am inclined to speak of their disciple and the continuator of their style, J. K. Huysmans, for he seems to me to have written more enduringly. "Le Bas" is written with an intensity and originality of thought and an ease that I do not find in Flaubert or in the brothers Goncourt. His ironies flow easily, he finds his epithets almost as easily as Balzac, and we escape the pianola music of the unfortunate Flaubert. But no more than Flaubert can he be considered a novelist. The word has grown hateful, and I will never use it again. Tale teller is the word to be used. The art of tale telling must be the most difficult of all the arts. For though there have been many musicians and many painters, there have been but two tale tellers.

Balzac is a great city in which there are exquisite houses, great palaces, and noble cathedrals, but never a peristyle or frieze. The pure and perfect beauty of antiquity is absent, the which we find in Corot and Turgenieff, above all in Turgenieff. Strange indeed are the ways of the God which guide, and we ask vainly why they should have placed the light of Greece, the light of the world, in the hand of a Scythian. Turgenieff thought very little of Balzac, and there can be very little doubt that Corot, the greatest landscape painter, would have thought very little of Turner; and wherein is matter for the subject of a second article.



## FIRE WEED

BY HENRIETTA R. ELIOT

STRANGE flower, thy purple, making haste  
 To glorify each blackened waste  
 Of fire-swept land,  
 Is with a blessed meaning fraught,  
 And we—when pain hath fully wrought—  
 Shall understand.



# MISS ATHERTON'S WANDERJAHR

By *Mary Moss*

*Author of "Fruit Out of Season," "Julian Meldohla," etc.*



## I.

**B**ELONGING to different scales of civilization, in the natural course of events they never would have entered each other's orbits, but life is occasionally capable even of bringing about the meeting of parallel lines, with playful intention and grimly inappropriate results.

It all happened simply enough. Since such entertainments were in vogue, Grace Atherton went to Mr. Penrose Cowan's studio tea in the same docile spirit with which she habitually dressed, dined, read the new book, played the prevailing game, and, Heaven save the mark! dabbled in highly sterilized slumming. For the matter of that, every detail of existence had undergone such competent sterilization before reaching her that, under a very perfect finish of manner and bearing, at heart she was perilously far from being immune.

Mr. Cowan's tea showed little of Bohemia. The studio was pleasantly free from plaster casts, messy draperies, unframed canvases, or long-haired painters. Instead of reeking of fresh turpentine and stale tobacco, the air was faintly sweet with roses and *veti-vert*. The subtlest knowledge and most delicately restrained taste alone could have created these harmonious apartments, in which a handful of choicely equipped men and women moved quietly to and fro, easily chatting in well-modulated tones. At the door Grace was greeted by her host, who looked like an immaculately turned-out St. John, not too young. Having secured a cup of tea, she crossed the room to inspect a moonlight scene apparently painted under the joint influence of Cazin and a Japanese fan. Mr. Cowan drew a deep breath of satisfaction; he believed that her coming placed him forever, gave him a certain cachet; henceforth he might frankly abandon himself to the social observances dear to his heart, instead of slaving away at the "art" which had been so useful a lever in prying open doors at which mere money might long have knocked in vain. His tale of guests was complete, yet the heavy portières of Louis Seize tapestry parted, and to his utter horror he saw

a brisk, handsome, smartly dressed young man, who shook hands cordially, and then surveyed the company with open interest, audibly remarking, "Some of your swell friends, Penrose, old man?"

Mr. Cowan nodded impressively. "Yes, just a few connoisseurs have been kind enough to drop in for a look at my things." There was a perceptible pause. "Can't you dine with me to-night at the Waldorf, Sidney?" he added in desperation.

Sidney shook an unabashed head. "Got another date. I'm only in town over night. Just stopped to have a talk with you about that new issue of preferred stock; but there's no hurry, I can wait here till your party's over."

Mr. Cowan was secretly wondering what excuse a man could make for turning his brother and business adviser out-of-doors, when the newcomer's irreverent eye lit upon Grace Atherton, bending her slim figure for a nearer view of the moonlight sketch, and he continued genially: "Now, she's all right! She'll do! Just introduce me to that charming young lady in gray and I'll give you no further trouble."

"My dear Sidney!" Penrose could hardly articulate, "that is—Miss—Grace—Atherton!"

"Thanks, old man,"—Sidney was disgustingly unimpressed,—"but I shall hardly get to the Grace this afternoon, though New York's a quick town. Miss Atherton is enough for to-day. Just trot her out; I'll do the rest. I never got within range of one of that kind before."

"Well, you see, that's exactly it," Penrose began volubly enough, but found his sentence somewhat difficult of utterance; "Miss Atherton is—well—you understand how it is—young ladies like that——"

"Oh, you be d——d, Penrose," said his brother amiably, "it's now five-fifteen by my watch. If by five-twenty you haven't managed to make me acquainted with your friend, I'll do it off my own bat. Not sure that wouldn't be the best way, anyhow."

Looking into his brother's agreeable, impertinent face, Penrose judged this to be no idle threat and, yielding to odious necessity, hurried across the polished floor with Sidney, murmuring perfunctorily, "Miss Atherton, may I present my brother?"

Grace acknowledged the introduction with the slightest of courtesies, and, seeing the stranger's extended hand, in perfect good faith gave him her empty teacup. At this he laughed with such sparkling and pleasant mirth that she smiled in sympathy, without in the least seeing where the joke might lie. Mr. Cowan fled in despair; the situation was quite beyond him.

Sidney deliberately shifted the cup into his left hand. "That was a good one on me, Miss Atherton. Now suppose we take a fresh start."

This time he actually seized her hand, shook it, and held it considerably longer than necessary. She saw no good way of stopping him; her code was not framed for meeting emergencies. With much friendliness he continued, "Isn't there a place where we can sit down and have a heart-to-heart talk? You're sure to be whisked away from me here."

The young man's assumption of confidential intimacy fairly took away her breath. No one, not even Sussex Lawrence, would have made such a barefaced suggestion. Unaccountably, she succumbed to his masterful ways, and promptly found herself ensconced upon a secluded divan with Mr. Sidney Cowan at her side—so close, in fact, that she emphatically drew back from him.

He looked at her with imploring eyes. "There now, you are offended. Please, please be a little kind to me! Can't you think what it is to a tired workingman all at once to find himself here, with *you*?"

He had no business to put that accent on the "you." It was unprecedented, familiar, impertinent, but, to her utter bewilderment, far from unpleasant. She ventured a glance at his face; fatigue had not told visibly upon his appearance, which was strangely to her taste. Brown and clean-featured, in point of actual good looks he was well above the average; but what chiefly attracted her was a sense of alert energy, of vitality, of gayety, all focussed for the moment in the one desire of being well with her.

"Are you fond of pictures?" She tried to put down the brake, unable to see where the present pace would whirl her.

"I adore Art," he rejoined with twinkling eyes. "Couldn't you go with me to the Metropolitan to-morrow morning? Old Penrose says they have some valuable paintings up there."

This time she was deeply annoyed and quietly arose to leave him. Quicker than thought he seized her hand, and she positively had to choose between remaining prisoner or informing the whole room of her predicament.

"Look here, Miss Atherton, don't you see I can't let you go like that? You are angry—the Lord knows why! Is there any reason a man shouldn't show a girl he likes her? If there is, you must tell me about it, and then I'll know better. But why on earth do you make yourself look beautiful,—not that you could help it,—and wear fetching hats and things, if you don't want people to adore you? And if they do, don't you expect them to tell you so?"

His voice and face showed such deep contrition that she sank back on the divan, oppressed with the enormity of her conduct, but unable to leave him in anger.

Relinquishing her hand, he spoke in hurried whispers: "There comes my finish! Quick, before she strikes us, when can I see you again?"

His watchful eye had truly interpreted the intentions of Sussex Lawrence's redoubtable mother, who now bore down upon them. "Grace, dear,"—the lady gave no time for introductions,—“I have a message for you about the train to-morrow. The others all have to go by the limited—a breakfast or something as soon as they reach Philadelphia. Can't you really get off before the three-o'clock train?”—as she spoke Mrs. Lawrence eyed Mr. Cowan with marked disfavor,—"and, Grace, dear, perhaps you will give me a lift? One of my horses wasn't roughed and I had to send the carriage home. If you are quite ready; everybody seems to be going, don't you think?"

At this interruption Grace had her first conscious moment of revolt, but while inward feelings worked confusedly along new lines, outward habit was sufficiently strong to carry on her usual routine of behavior, and she was borne away unresisting in her captor's wake, with only a formal farewell to the most exciting experience of a lifetime.

Once in the carriage Mrs. Lawrence began: "What an appalling young man! If Mr. Cowan has such people about, he can hardly expect any of us to go again. Who was he?"

"His brother, I think." Grace controlled a feeble wish to protest.

"Dearest child, and you sat and talked with him!" Mrs. Lawrence remonstrated. "Really, if you are so gentle and so perfect in your consideration for the feelings of others, you will be imposed upon all your life." Miss Atherton's rebelliousness went no further than an unvoiced conviction that this was certainly true in regard to her relations with Mrs. Lawrence. "But I do not think," her tormentor continued, "that anyone is bound to be civil to a person like that. Mr. Cowan cannot indulge in sentiment for his family if he wishes to see us at his parties. You would have been fully justified in snubbing him and his impossible brother."

Grace's mute antagonism grew stronger at every word. Why should Mrs. Lawrence venture to criticise her? she was not engaged to Sussex yet. Some day he would doubtless ask her to marry him, and she vaguely expected to say yes. With other suitors she had always known beforehand that the answer was to be no, and not feeling so convinced of the negative in this case, it was natural to conclude that she wished Sussex for a husband. Now this terrible, volcanic young man had come and talked in a way that, while frightening and offending her, had put all manner of wild ideas into her head. What if a man's falling in love at first sight were an ordinary occurrence which had heretofore just chanced to be outside of her personal experience, and not, as she had taken for granted, a sort of stage convention, something as suitable to real life as opera recitative? Only a gusty and irresistible passion could have driven a stranger to such lengths. Of

course, she would never see him again, she should have curbed him more quickly; but it had been a thrilling episode, not devoid of sweetness, and she wished this horrid woman would let her meditate upon it in peace.

## II.

HER hours being as closely scheduled as those of a royal princess, it was not till Miss Atherton was established in the train that she found leisure to meditate upon yesterday's extraordinary events. A tall footman gave her maid the checks and tickets, tipped two porters, adjusted footstools and blinds, then solicitously awaited starting-time on the station platform. As the train drew out of Jersey City snow fell in quick, powdery flakes. Grace watched it mechanically and thought of Sussex Lawrence, who had taken her in to dinner the night before. She had examined him attentively, for with Mrs. Lawrence already assuming the rights of a mother-in-law, it behooved her to be increasingly circumspect. For the first time she found her suitor flavorless. His distinguished appearance struck her as a trifle dry, and though what he said was always agreeable, she was suddenly conscious of knowing beforehand quite well what it was likely to be. The prickings of doubt were uncomfortable to Grace. Life had always been so smoothly adjusted as to spare her the crude effort of conscious choice, each action being the inevitable outcome of accepted conditions. She had never even known an unfulfilled wish, the cup having always been at her lips before she had quite reached the point of feeling thirsty. To-day things seemed strangely different. Failing to become interested in her book, she listened with a sense of wistful flatness to rather pronounced bursts of laughter from the smoking-compartment. The ball for which she was bound promised no special pleasure. As a penalty of wealth and the prominence of her family, she was too much like an official person ever to be permitted a mere girl's frivolous good time. Her very partners for to-night had been arranged weeks ago by a thoughtful hostess. They would send her flowers and show her every attention, but she would hardly differentiate one man from another. Rahway already! How it snowed! She was mentally yawning. The party of smokers seemed to be breaking up; several men, projecting a choking atmosphere of tobacco, passed through to the next car. One of these stopped at the vacant seat by hers. To save her life she could not help looking straight up into the friendly face of Mr. Sidney Cowan.

"Now, Miss Atherton," he began cheerfully, "shall I pretend this is a lucky chance or tell the truth? Better not do that, I guess. You were going to be pretty cross with me yesterday for being strictly truthful when your friend, the ice-wagon (excuse me; I've no doubt she is a perfectly lovely character), routed us out. However, she did one kind act when she put me on to your going by this train."



Grace said nothing, but this outcome of Mrs. Lawrence's interference made her taste all the joys of vengeance.

The young man went on: "I have been trying to break away from those fellows ever since we started to see if you were here, but there was no getting off from them till now."

Her continued silence seemed to stir a vague doubt, and he spoke with a certain hesitation.

"Penrose says I annoyed you yesterday and spoilt your afternoon. Now, it is up to you to decide. If he is right, just say the word, and back I go to sit alone in that den and repent of my sins. Otherwise, with your permission, I'll stay here and have the pleasure of looking at you while you give me a regular scolding."

"I certainly have no right either to scold you or to prohibit you from using your own seat, Mr. Cowan," Grace basely compromised.

The young man shook his head. "No, that won't do. Am I to go or to stay? Don't you see, I can't run the risk of stopping here if the sight of me is a nuisance to you."

Standing by his empty chair he looked dramatically penitent, and the exciting human relation, redolent of spice and warmth, taken for granted by him, contrasted agreeably with the tempered form of intercourse with which she was familiar. They were already nearing Trenton, time was growing short, and a safe retreat secured, as the Bradfords were to meet her in Philadelphia. It could never mean anything to her, and as for him, things seemed to have reached a pass where his feelings were bound to suffer whatever course she pursued. She made a gracious little gesture towards his vacant seat. The die was cast.

The next half hour proved full of perilous enchantment. Grace was reckless,—not, indeed, in her own speech, but in giving ear to what impressed her as a torrent of the most direct, irrepressible love-making. The young man allowed her no time to think; keeping him within any bounds strained all her faculties. Suddenly, through the snow-coated window, she saw that their train had entered the Philadelphia station. In the scurry of collecting wraps, leaving the car, and being welcomed by the Bradfords, even Mr. Cowan's efficiency could not compass much of a parting; as she had foreseen, they were separated almost without a word of farewell.

### III.

GRACE awoke at noon the next day with shadowy memories of the ball, of snow-blocked streets, and of an empty world. She hoped that Sussex Lawrence's proposal had been averted, at least for the time. Fearing its approach, in the intervals between dances she had put unwonted obstacles in his way, exerting herself to the point of actual flirtation with several of her allotted partners. These gentlemen had



responded promptly enough in a restrained, innocuous fashion, and poor Grace was mortified to find herself craving something less insipid. She doubted if any of these men were capable of a sudden, overwhelming passion, much less of giving it free rein regardless of consequences. Her young blood was fired with a longing for change, for experiments, for ventures into a strange, new world, the very existence of which came as a revelation—a dangerous, alarming world, yet full of seduction. As she was far too timid for any sustained course along untried ways, these new sensations did not carry her beyond a determination to avoid a climax with Sussex Lawrence. Curiously enough, on the other hand, the evening's events had firmly decided Mr. Lawrence to settle matters at once. Seeing Grace so unlike herself, he intelligently divined that something had gone wrong, and very logically reasoned that she was resenting his slowness in declaring himself. His own idea would have been to become engaged in Holy Week and announce it at Easter. Then the wedding could be in June, and after two months abroad there would still be time for them to spend part of the season at Newport. A methodical soul, he disliked altering a well-laid plan, but infinitely preferred this trifling change to causing Grace one shadow of vexation.

After a late breakfast he prepared to sally forth from the hotel, and on ringing for a hansom was much taken aback to find that owing to the snow, which still fell steadily, not a street was open to carriages. The railroads were completely blocked, telephone and telegraph communication long since broken.

"They say we'll be storm-stayed here for a couple of days at least, sir," said his servant lugubriously; "it's a regular blizzard, sir."

The prospect of being housebound in a hotel was dismal to a man who had begun the day with a programme of being a happy lover before afternoon tea. Having made up his mind to act, Mr. Lawrence had scant patience for delays caused by the weather. Mrs. Bradford lived a short block from the hotel; he quite fancied the idea of ploughing through the drifts and giving his wayward lady this proof of courage and ardor. He arrived, snowy and breathless, causing a pleasant commotion in the Bradford household, where he was made much of and dried off before the blazing library fire. Mrs. Bradford excused herself for answering notes in his presence—her writing-room was unendurably cold. He and Grace were soon side by side on a sofa, somewhat remote from their hostess.

"Dear Grace," he began in a low tone, "I came to-day for a special purpose." Grace felt desperate. She hated the way he was going to look when she had said no, yet the even, obvious life he was offering hopelessly repelled her. She vaguely wished to live unmarried, now and again being warmed and cheered by lucky chance meetings with Mr. Sidney Cowan, who should be perpetually satisfied to regard her

as a distant loadstar. Mr. Lawrence continued: "You must know what I mean, my dearest. Will——"

"Please, Madam,"—a trim buttons had entered the room,—"this is the only paper to be had to-day." He held out a damp sheet showing six scare-head columns.

"Very well, Brown," Mrs. Bradford spoke over her shoulder, turning around to add, "Give it to Miss Atherton." She laid down her pen. "Mr. Lawrence, could you come here for a minute? I'm so anxious for your advice about having this old miniature restored. It is a Malbone, and a good one. They say that you know of some wonderful person in New York. Why do you run off, Miss Atherton?" (Poor Grace had moved towards the door, thinking to seek respite in flight.) "This is the only warm place in the house."

Feeling the Fates against her, Grace glanced languidly at the paper and read, in screaming headlines:

**"CUPID'S COURSE CUT SHORT BY CRUEL SNOW!**

**"GLEANINGS IN THE HOTEL LOBBIES!**

**"OUR REPORTER'S SPICY TALKS WITH BLIZZARD'S VICTIMS!**

"Among the many wayfarers forcibly detained in this city by a blizzard whose dimensions dwarf Nansen's most perilous experiences none is more impatient to leave than Mr. Sidney Cowan, a gentleman equally famous in Washington business and social circles both as rising financier and for his reputation as the handsomest single man on the Atlantic City Boardwalk last summer. It is stated that Mr. Cowan vainly offered five thousand dollars to the Pennsylvania Railroad to run him a special engine as far as Baltimore before eight o'clock this evening. Mr. Cowan frankly confessed to our reporter that his reason for haste was a sentimental one. At that hour, in her father's home on Eutaw Street, Miss Belle Bosler, one of the Border City's loveliest daughters, is to assemble her family and friends to announce her betrothal to Mr. Sidney Cowan! Benedick is at last brought to book! The magnificent ring which he showed our——"

The paper dropped from Grace's nerveless fingers, the world tumbled about her ears. Dazed, she looked up into her suitor's eyes, for, eager to renew his wooing, he had returned unnoticed to her side, and now anxiously remarked her air of faintness. At the other end of the room Mrs. Bradford sat diligently writing; her back was towards them. Mr. Lawrence took Miss Atherton's hand respectfully in his. "May this be mine," he asked, "for always, Grace?"

Shelter after the storm! Rest for the weary! Why had she ever dreamt of being fit to venture into an unknown, tricky world, there to make herself ridiculous? To be fooled, played with, all but disgraced! Thankful, she smiled up wanly into the safe, familiar face.

"If you wish it, Sussex!"

Miss Atherton had come home from her Wanderjahr.

# HOW MISS TURKINGTON DID NOT SEE QUEEN VICTORIA

*By Seumas MacManus*

*Author of "The Leadin' Road to Donegal," "The Bewitched Fiddle," etc.*



**I**T was all because of that vexatious little, old Mrs. McIlraith. Miss Turkington and she had been friends five-and-fifty years: but they are friends no longer.

Both Miss Turkington and Mrs. McIlraith were eminently nice and genteel old ladies, with similar well-ordered tastes. Both of them were fond of old china, old songs, old music, old friends, and old servants. Both of them lived in little, old, quaint, and ivy-covered houses, hidden away from the public gaze by high hedges. Both of them entertained their select friends on alternate weeks with little teas, at which a little cake the recipes for which lingered only with themselves, and much gossip, were discussed. Both of them kept a store of gooseberry wine all the year round. And both of them went abroad dressed in black only.

But there was much disparity in their manner and great disparity in their size. Miss Turkington was remarkably tall, and carried herself with a stiff erectness that strongly suggested hauteur. Mrs. McIlraith was small, and had, besides, a droop in her shoulders, and carried with her everywhere a conciliating look. Miss Turkington was eminently self-reliant, and Mrs. McIlraith very dependent. Miss Turkington was, as you have presumed, a spinster. Mrs. McIlraith was a widow of thirty years' standing.

Moreover,—and herein lay the great disparity,—Miss Turkington had been and seen Queen Victoria; Mrs. McIlraith had never been so blessed!

Yes, Miss Turkington, then a young lady in her bloom, had gone to Dublin with her parents in '61, and seen with her own eyes (henceforward blessed) Queen Victoria. When, yet, she gave a state tea, she set before her guests the very teaset which she purchased on that day of hallowed memory, and she treated them for the hundred-and-some-oddth time to an account of how she had seen the Queen, with detailed

## 362 How Miss Turkington Did Not See Queen Victoria

particulars of the shade, quality, and design of every article of dress she displayed.

And when she repeated this story for the hundred-and-some-oddth time little Mrs. McIlraith hearkened with the same rapt attention with which she had listened to it for the first. And then too, for the hundred-and-some-oddth time, little Mrs. McIlraith looked upon Miss Turkington with eyes of envy.

And in 1900 the joyous news came to Dungannon, and to the tea-table of Miss Turkington, that Queen Victoria had again consented to visit her "faithful Irish subjects" (so the London newspaper men put it), and would arrive in Dublin in the beginning of April.

"And," said Miss Turkington, after bestowing the glad tidings on her guests, "I am (D. V.) going up to Dublin to refresh these eyes with one other sight of the dear old Queen: then I'll die happy, whensoever it shall please God to call me. Mrs. McIlraith, I'll fetch you with me to see your Queen," she added with the air of one who knew all about how it was done.

Then poor Mrs. McIlraith was nigh overcome with gratitude and delight, and, with tears of joy streaming down her countenance, she got to her feet and hugged Miss Turkington before the company.

In good time Miss Turkington pre-engaged rooms for herself and Mrs. McIlraith, and likewise a window along the processional route. And on the eve of the visit she and Mrs. McIlraith (who had slept very little for a week before) arrived in Dublin, and having seen their rooms and dined, and visited their hired window and approved of it, took the train for Kingstown.

"For, my dear Mrs. McIlraith," Miss Turkington said, "you must come with me to see the *very spot* upon which our beloved Queen landed in '61, and the *very spot* on which our still beloved Queen shall, God willing, stand to-morrow."

Arrived at Kingstown, they went and did due honor to the very spot on which their beloved Queen landed forty years before, and to the very spot on which their still beloved Queen would land on the morrow. Mrs. McIlraith was rather more of a trial to Miss Turkington than the latter had anticipated. Under ordinary circumstances Mrs. McIlraith was nervous and timid; but in a strange place, and that a busy, bustling, noisy, crowded centre, such as Mrs. McIlraith had never before experienced, she was doubly and trebly nervous and vacillating. And, unlucky as such people always are, no sooner would Miss Turkington have rescued her from imminent death in the form of a passing tram, than she had to extricate her from among the feet of a pair of coach-horses; and when she hopped from the destruction that flew with a handcart the arms of a drayman only saved her from a surer death.

Miss Turkington, as quickly as possible, hurried her friend back to

## How Miss Turkington Did Not See Queen Victoria 363

the point from which they should take their departure. As there was no immediate sign of a tram, Miss Turkington, wishing to purchase an article in bog-oak which, in a window round the corner, had struck her eye and her fancy, asked Mrs. McIlraith to remain whilst she ran off to make the purchase. She warned Mrs. McIlraith not to move from the spot on her peril. And Mrs. McIlraith promised, and, indeed, intended to keep her promise, only a man came along, who, standing to wait for a tram likewise, began to stare at her (she fancied), so, to get rid of him, she walked in the direction Miss Turkington had gone, assured that she would now meet that lady coming back.

But Mrs. McIlraith walked, without meeting her friend, much farther than she had intended, and turned a couple of corners, looking in vain for the particular bog-oak shop. Then in alarm she endeavored to retrace her steps, but though she wandered and poked about in keen distress, it was half-an-hour before she found (with a policeman's help) the waiting-place again, and when she did find it there was no Miss Turkington there. And though she remained on the spot for another half-hour no Miss Turkington came. Poor Mrs. McIlraith was now in a woful state of alarm. Concluding that Miss Turkington must have supposed her gone to Dublin and followed after, she at length took the tram for Dublin also, and it was only as she entered the city that her very mixed-up faculties suggested to her the question, "Where am I going to?" She didn't know the hotel; she didn't know the street; she didn't even know the quarter of the city. She had heard Miss Turkington give the name of the street to the cabman when they were leaving the Great Northern Terminus, and she heard her name the hotel several times. And though, in a place where strange names and strange things were crowding her, she had given only passing attention to the name of the hotel, she might still have recalled or recognized it with a little effort if she had had her faculties clear. But with the poor woman they were, just then, only about as clear as ditch-water after a downpour.

When the tram conductor asked her where she wanted to be left off she stared at him; and when he repeated his question she said, "Oh, man, I don't know." He whistled and went away.

At the monument in O'Connell Street he helped her down from the car and whispered to a policeman that this was a poor old lady who seemed to be wandering in her mind and required looking after. To the questioning policeman Mrs. McIlraith could not give any very clear account of herself—and, indeed, very few straight answers to his questions—further than to inform him that she and a friend were stopping at some hotel; and though he named every hotel he could think of in the city, she shook her head at each of them, not recognizing any of them as that at which they had engaged rooms. And the further he



## 364 How Miss Turkington Did Not See Queen Victoria

catechised her, the more dazed did she become. At length, as she seemed about to get faint, he, with a comrade's help, carried her into a druggist's. Of three or four people who pressed forward to get a peep at her, by a most happy chance she was instantly recognized by one, a Colonel Sterne, of Saltown—a suburb of Dublin which is widely known because of its private asylum for the insane. This Colonel Sterne and his wife were old friends of Miss Turkington's, at whose tea-table, on the occasion of many visits to Dungannon, they had often met Mrs. McIlraith. And he had just recently changed his residence from Glasnevin to Saltown. So the Colonel, whom she in turn recognized, persuaded her to place herself in his charge, he taking her home to stop with them at Saltown whilst search would be making for Miss Turkington. Then he wired to the District Inspector of Police in Dungannon, asking him to endeavor to procure from any of Miss Turkington's friends the address of the hotel at which she was staying in Dublin, adding that he had charge of her companion, Mrs. McIlraith. Though the Colonel waited impatiently for a reply all the remainder of the evening, he got none, for the District Inspector of Police was absent and only received the telegram by the following morning's post, whereupon he hastened back to Dungannon with all possible speed in order to make the necessary inquiries.

Now, when Miss Turkington, just a few minutes after Mrs. McIlraith quitted it, returned to the place where she had left her friend and found her gone she was as much annoyed as alarmed, and as much alarmed as annoyed. She waited and walked about for some time, and as still there was no sign of Mrs. McIlraith, and as, moreover, a tram inspector informed her that he observed a little lady of the description supplied by Miss Turkington boarding a Dublin-bound tram some time previous, Miss Turkington concluded that Mrs. McIlraith had taken a huff at being left alone in the public street, and, refusing to wait, had gone to Dublin and to the hotel. Consequently, after a reasonable delay, she too took a tram and proceeded to the city. But when she reached her hotel and found that Mrs. McIlraith had not shown up there she took fright, which increased each succeeding minute that she waited there and found not any sign of Mrs. McIlraith arriving. Then, after creating much alarm in the hotel, thinking it more than possible that she had left her friend behind her in Kingstown, she rushed out and away to observe the trams arriving from Kingstown. But after two weary, fruitless hours of this she wended her way back to the hotel again, worn and forlorn and sick at heart. As she expected, there was not any word of Mrs. McIlraith at the hotel either; and after a further deliberation with friends in the hotel, it was concluded that Mrs. McIlraith had left Kingstown in a pout, that (stupid body which she was) she had forgotten the very name of the hotel, thus increasing



## How Miss Turkington Did Not See Queen Victoria 365

her pout and vexation, and so she had driven to the railway station and taken train for home.

And though the conclusion seemed the most plausible, Miss Turkington slept no wink all that night, but tossed feverishly in bed, trying to get away from the haunting thought that all those hours Mrs. McIlraith might still be trudging through the dreary streets of Dublin, or the drearier ones of Kingstown.

As soon as the post-office opened in the morning Miss Turkington was there, dispatching a telegram to Dungannon to find if Mrs. McIlraith had arrived home safely. And quickly came back the answer that nothing had been seen or heard of Mrs. McIlraith since both of them had together quitted Dungannon.

When this telegram was handed to her in her apartments in the hotel, poor Miss Turkington's distress was so extreme that she sank upon the bed and gave way to tears of mingled misery and vexation. But she got worse when, two hours later, a second telegram came, this time from the District Inspector of Police, requesting her to hurry to Bagshot House, Saltown, whither (the wire stated) Mrs. McIlraith had been taken.

When Miss Turkington heard that her friend had been taken to Saltown she (naturally) fainted, and it took all the efforts of all the maids to aid her recovery. And when she had recovered she was helped into a cab, the driver of which she ordered to hasten to the private asylum at Saltown. When after forty-five minutes' agony she reached that institution she announced that she was the particular friend of the old lady, Mrs. McIlraith, who had been taken here yesterday, informed the matron that there really could not be anything the matter with Mrs. McIlraith's mind beyond a temporary confusion or wandering, the cause of which was easily explained, and begged to be permitted to see her unfortunate friend at once.

"But, Madam, do you not think you make a mistake?" the matron queried. "There was no lady patient, old or young, admitted here yesterday. Nor have we anyone of that name in the house."

"Isn't this," said Miss Turkington, "the Saltown Private Asylum for the Insane?"

The matron admitted it was.

"Bagshot House?" Miss Turkington queried.

"No," said the matron, "Bagshot House is a private residence five minutes down the way."

"Oh, my!" said poor Miss Turkington, throwing up her hands appealingly, "oh, my!"

In her confusion she did not even offer apology or explanation to the matron, whom she left standing there in bewilderment as she trotted again to her cab.

When she arrived at Bagshot House and was met by Mrs. McIlraith, who came through the hall to meet her, both old ladies fainted outright, giving the Colonel and his lady and the servants a busy time laying them out and resuscitating them. And when, after much trouble and anxiety, they were brought to their senses, they just looked at each other and went off into a faint again. Altogether the pair of them fainted three times in Bagshot House. And when they were ultimately quite restored, the account (from an evening special) of Queen Victoria's entry into Dublin was read by the Colonel to two people who listened thereto with disappointed and bitter hearts.

Next morning when Miss Turkington had settled her hotel bill and paid a round sum for two windows in Grafton Street (windows which, at the passing of Queen Victoria, were conspicuously vacant), Miss Turkington led Mrs. McIlraith to the railway station and took the train for Dungannon, where travelling they exchanged few words—and those few neither sweet nor amiable.

And one year and eight months elapsed ere Mrs. McIlraith sat at Miss Turkington's tea-table or Miss Turkington smiled upon Mrs. McIlraith again.



## THE SEA AT NOON

BY MAURICE FRANCIS EGAN

WHO rocks the little billows of the deep,  
 That, curved as grace itself, they kiss the air,  
 Then sink in curves, and with the noon-day share  
 The stillness that can neither laugh nor weep?  
 What languid revels do the sea-nymphs keep  
 That, in the summer, when the days are fair,  
 They slowly to the sky cast garlands rare  
 Of foam-flowers, though the blue seems fixed in sleep?

Always the joy of life lies in the sea,—  
 Who knows it, loves it, and his fancies play  
 With all its moods for joy,—whether it wakes  
 Gentle as dawn upon the bright To Be  
 Of rosy youth; or, dashing high its spray,  
 The world with ecstasy of tumult shakes.

# THE BRIBING OF THE SENATOR

*By Josephine Dixon*



OLD Mrs. Higgins put the dish of fried apples in the centre of the table. She drew up a chair for Hiram and another for herself. She wiped her mouth with her apron, concealing as best she could the removal of her false plate. Calling her husband from the woodshed, she waited, with her eyes fixed anxiously on the plate of apples, until he appeared. When he was seated at the head of the table she motioned him to say grace.

"Praise God from whom all blessings flow," said the old man solemnly; "praise Him for these bounties; praise Him for our good appetites; praise Him for our good digestion, and, oh Lord, make us use our strength for Thy glorification, and if it be Thy will, put it into the hearts of the legislators of our country to allow our claim, for Christ's sake. Amen."

"Amen," echoed the woman.

She passed the dish of apples to him, and he helped himself to about a shovelful. One or two long strings fell on the clean cloth, and he scraped them up with his knife and conveyed them to his mouth. Mrs. Higgins filled her plate, and, leaning well over the table, ate industriously.

"Clarissy," said the old man, licking his lips, "everything you cook has a flavor. Now I know that down there at the New Willurd these here apples wouldn't taste any better than so much tanbark."

Mrs. Higgins passed him an affectionate glance, while she struggled with an elusive section of peeling, half of which she had already captured in her mouth.

"Oh, that's the way you allus talk," she said when she had succeeded in making the entire spiral a prisoner. "Some men would think as they had good cause to complain ef they had nothin' but fried apples for dinner."

"Shuh," commented the old man.

His wife reflected a few minutes, and then, with her knife poised in midair, she said,—

"Don't fill yourself too full, Hiram; we have dessert."

Mr. Higgins made no sign of having seen it cooling on the chopping-block as he came in from the woodshed.

"You don't say!" he remarked in an astonishment that made Mrs. Higgins, even, a little suspicious. "You don't say! Do tell!"

She put away her distrust and smiled at him as tenderly as the absence of her false teeth would allow.

"Guess," she said.

Her husband looked bewildered.

"Sliced apples with sugar?"

Mrs. Higgins was pained.

"You know we haven't had any sugar for a week."

"Well, sliced apples without sugar."

She shook her head.

"Apple dumplings?"

"You have to have flour for them. Seems as if you men think flour and sugar comes down like manna."

"Give it up."

Mrs. Higgins waited to see if he would not make another attempt, but he refused.

"Baked apples," she announced, and waited for the fulness of the surprise to bear in on him.

He did not disappoint her, and when she had brought him a clean plate and an unsweetened baked apple he consumed it with a delight that would have furnished inspiration to any cook. When his plate was quite cleared, and he had even pursued the last drops of juice with his limber steel knife, he pushed back his chair and balanced himself on its back legs.

"I ironed your collar," said Mrs. Higgins, anticipating his question, "and I brushed your clothes and laid them out. Ef you go out by the back gate and keep close to the fence, you'll not get your shoes muddy. I wouldn't like you to be seen at the Capitol with muddy shoes."

Mr. Higgins felt called upon for a little masculine disdain, but his sonorous sniff was too kindly to rankle.

"I've been going over the ground again," he remarked after a pause, "and I'm pretty sure ef we get the claim, it'll mean not only the money, but a good stretch of land down as far as the creek."

"Enough for chickens?" asked his wife a little breathlessly.

"Shuh,—chickens and a cow thrown in. But I must be off. When a man's got business at the Nation's Capitol, he ain't no time for dilly-dallying with womenfolks. It's a good hour to the trolley and another to the Capitol."

When he appeared a few minutes later with slick wet hair, in shiny black, store-made clothes, his boots reeking with the castor-oil used to make them waterproof, his wife viewed the caricature of her husband and gave a sigh of ecstatic admiration.

"I jest feel sure you'll succeed," was the feminine tribute paid his beauty.

Then she took out of her apron two large apples she had gathered from the tree that took up more than half of their front yard.

"I thought as likely you might get hungry before you came back, and so I picked the two finest ones."

The man took them and stuffed them in his pocket.

"That's jest like you, Clarissy, allus thinkin' of me an' my comfort. Well, so long."

Senator Fenton was pacing the corridors of the Capitol in an agony of suspense. He had his hands buried deep in his pockets and his face drawn into a network of anxious lines. He passed members of the House and Senate alike without a sign of recognition.

"Fenton looks dead beat, don't he?" remarked one Representative to another as they passed him in the rotunda and turned to look after him. "Poor devil, he takes it hard."

A bareheaded boy approached the Senator. He glanced around as if he would have been glad to give someone else the opportunity of interrupting the man's absorbing reverie.

"A—ah—a man to see you, Senator. Higgins, I think he calls himself."

The Senator looked at him a few seconds before he gathered the meaning of his words; then he turned and slowly retraced his steps towards the Senate.

"I'll see him in the marble room," he said wearily.

Mr. Higgins, perspiring freely, presented his claim. When he had finished his story he waited for a response. He waited patiently, easing himself first on one squeaking boot and then the other. He wondered vaguely if the Senator was deaf, or if these were the ways of greatness. After a time the Senator looked in his direction and seemed surprised to see him. He drew down his brows in an effort to remember the man's business. Then he looked at the bulging pockets of the figure in front of him.

"You have your papers with you?" he asked tentatively.

Mr. Higgins followed the glance, and his hand sought his pocket.

"No, sir," he said, drawing out an apple in each hand. "Senator Harmon has my papers. It was him who told me to see you. If you would be so good, sir, as to speak to him about it, I think as how you would see I had told you only the truth."

The Senator nodded and looked towards the door, and the old man understood the invitation. He would have gone quickly, but he was hampered by the social requirement of making a farewell. His lips hung on his dry teeth. His boots were squeaking an anthem of uneasiness. The apples were still in his hand, and he pushed one out towards the Senator as his voice returned to him.

"They've taken the prize at every county fair for ten years," he



stammered. "Would you take one—maybe you'd like it—or if you have a child—children like the flag-red color of 'em——"

The Senator extended his hand and relieved the old man of the apple.

"It is a fine one," he said, with the first gleam of interest in his manner.

When Senator Fenton reached home a trained nurse in white apron and cap met him at the door of the child's room.

"Be careful not to excite her," she warned. "Try not to let her see that you are worried."

The man crept into the room. The child lay under the covers, that were scarcely lifted by her tiny, emaciated figure. Her face was turned towards the wall, but she heard his step and asked in a whisper,—

"Is that you, Daddy?"

She motioned with her finger, and with tender hands he lifted her and turned her towards the light.

"Shall I tell you about the little girl that fell into the well?"

Her eyelids fluttered and she closed her eyes.

"I am so tired," she whispered.

Tears rose in the man's eyes, but he forced them back.

"Or Beauty and the Beast?"

"I am so tired," she whispered again.

The nurse came in with a glass feeding-cup filled with milk. The child, seeing it, broke into feeble crying.

"Just a little," coaxed the nurse. The father added an appeal.

"O Daddy, I can't, I can't!" she sobbed. "Make her take it away."

The Senator and the nurse exchanged discouraged glances, and he followed her to the door.

"Has she taken nothing to-day?"

"Absolutely nothing," replied the woman. "We dare not excite her by forcing her to take it. The rectal feeding and the hypodermics exhaust her almost as much as they strengthen her. Unless she can take food normally—into her stomach—unless we can stimulate the appetite, I am afraid—that is, the Doctor says——"

He did not wait to hear the end of the sentence. He had heard it before, and his own observation was enough to feed his sharpest fears. He returned to the bed, and the child looked at him gratefully.

"Thank you, Daddy," and then again the murmur, "I am so tired," that seemed burned into his brain.

A little saliva trickled from between her relaxed lips. He reached into his pocket for a handkerchief, and his hand touched the apple

that the old man had given him. When he had wiped her lips he showed it to her.

"Look, honey!" he exclaimed, with a brave assumption of cheer, "did you ever see such a big apple?"

She opened her eyes and looked at it wearily.

"See, it is so red—just as red as the stripes of a flag—and see, when I throw it up, it looks like a toy balloon."

Her glance followed it weakly as it coursed towards the ceiling. The man, rejoicing at this sign of interest, did as many strange things with it as his imagination admitted. It passed behind his back and came out of unexpected pockets or from under the bedcovers; once, even, it came from beneath her pillow, and she gave a little gasp of pleasure as its cool cheek touched hers. The Senator, grateful almost to tears for the curiously acquired toy, noticed at last that as the apple came near her face her little, swollen tongue touched her lips. It surprised him for an instant, but the idea seemed too improbable, and he continued to play with it and watch with delighted hope the child's appreciation. At last she motioned him, and he bent his ear towards her.

"Does it taste good, Daddy?" she asked.

He took a knife from the table and peeled the apple. With the blade he scraped up a spoonful of the pulp. She opened her mouth and he put it on her tongue.

"This is our secret, birdie," he said. "If nurse knew, I am afraid she would discharge us. A little more? well, well. Not too much, honey—some more after awhile. Well, just a tiny bit, and to-morrow morning I'll come as soon as it is light,—sooner, then,—and you shall have some more."

That night while the nurse was dozing the child startled her by asking for something to eat.

Senator Fenton was in the barber-shop waiting his turn to be shaved when a Southern colleague took the seat beside him.

"By Jove, Fenton," he said, "I can't tell you how glad I am that the little one has pulled through. They tell me she looks as fine as a fiddle—racing about everywhere and good for a hundred years."

The Senator's voice had a way of getting tangled when the child was mentioned. He took his friend's hand in both of his and wrung it painfully.

"Yes, yes," he answered, when he had swallowed the tangles, "she's all right—good as new. It was a hard struggle, though, and God knows how I ever endured it. I tell you, Burton, many a night I've sat with one of her little, blue hands in mine and a pistol beside me, and—well, it doesn't sound heroic, but I'd have used it when the

tiny fingers unclasped. You see, she cost me her mother, and when a man at my age begins to love things, it isn't so easy to let go."

Burton shifted about in his chair, embarrassed, as men ever are when another shows his soul.

"There isn't much of anything that can stand out against modern methods in medicine, is there?" he asked.

Fenton paused before he answered.

"Modern methods of medicine are all right. Doctor Johnson and the rest of them say I owe the child's life to saline solutions and that sort of thing. Maybe they're right. I'm disposed to think, though, that the human system is less of a known quantity than the average practitioner thinks it is, and that medicine is pretty far from an exact science yet. There was a time when it seemed as if a few bites of a ripe apple had pulled her through a crisis, but, of course, the doctors hoot the notion, and I'm far from willing to make an assertion that the faculty would find so incredible."

The barber motioned him to a seat. When his face was covered with lather and only one side had been cleaned smooth the electric bells from the Senate set up a furious ringing. Senator Burton, still waiting for his shave, uttered an impatient exclamation.

"Quorum wanted and a d——d batch of bills that nobody cares anything about," he said disgustedly. "A lot of little claims—and, by the way, did you ever see that old fellow named Higgins that eats apples?"

The barber nearly tumbled over backward as Fenton jumped out of the chair and, wiping the lather off of the unshaved side of his face, dashed out without a word of explanation. Burton looked after him wonderingly, and as he took the vacated chair he remarked,—

"The Senator seemed to think there was a hurry."

In the Senate there was something of a struggle over the batch of little claims, but they finally slid through by one vote.

The same evening Senator Fenton, driving with his little girl, found it convenient to take a road that led out across the long bridge into an adjoining county of Virginia. In the dusk they made out the little house by the large apple-tree that nearly filled the tiny, fenced-in yard.

When Hiram and Clarissy heard the glorious news they fell into each other's arms and wept together.

"We'll have chickens and a cow," sobbed the woman, and the old man trumpeted in a vain effort to suppress his emotion. Fenton's eyes too were swimming, but when the couple turned towards him, calling down all the benefactions of Heaven upon him for his goodness, he waved them aside.

"There's no credit coming to me," he laughed. "My vote was bought and paid for in advance."

# THREE LETTERS AND A NOTE

*By Albertine Grandall*



TAKEN FROM A PACKAGE OF LETTERS FOUND IN THE ESCRITOIRE OF  
MISS EDITH RALSTON

"SAN FRANCISCO, January 24, 1901.

"MY DEAREST ONE: Just one week ago to-night I was bidding you good-by in New York; now three thousand miles divide us. When I look forward to the long, weary months of waiting before I can go for you they seem endless. Will they ever creep by? To keep up my courage I am continually repeating, 'January, February, March, April; January, February, March, April.' And then,—May and *You*. What a beautiful bride you'll be, Edith, and, please God, a happy one, if a man's love and devotion count for aught. I can see you now as you'll look on our wedding-day, all gowned in white, your hair like satin, your eyes like stars. I am glad your hair is dark, Edith, for no real reason except an absurd fancy that the people who have light hair are not always to be trusted. Speaking of blondes reminds me of George's guest and her strange story; also that my purpose in writing this evening isn't merely to tell you how much I love you,—that would be impossible,—but to fulfil my promise—to write you just how, where, and with whom I have passed my time since I left you.

"If my numerous notes reached their destination, you know how deadily uninteresting the overland journey was, and how correspondingly enthusiastic I became when George boarded the train at Sixteenth Street. While crossing the bay we held a regular Harvard post-mortem, ending, as in 'ye olden times,' with an argument. 'Just like you,' do I hear you say? What else could be expected of two lawyers? Our argument was over where I was to live. As usual, George won; for though I preferred staying at a hotel, he wouldn't listen to it. He said, as the senior member of the new law firm of Bell & Belmont, *his* wishes were the first to be considered, and a lot more nonsense, until I, as the junior member of the aforesaid illustrious firm, conceded the point, and the court adjourned to meet later at 1602 Broadway,—George's residence,—where I shall stay for the present. Already, in

the two days I have been here, they've made me feel at home; so perhaps it's best that I came, for God knows it will be lonely enough anywhere without you!

"The Bells are a most interesting family. George you have met; Mrs. George is a rosy-cheeked, matronly looking lady with a kind heart and charming manners; the two children—a boy and a girl—are animated interrogation points. 'Have you a pretty lady in your watch—Ted says so—have you? Is she your sweetheart? Why don't you marry her, like papa did mamma?' were among their first questions. Madge Dargie—the guest—is fair, petite, and rather pretty—under gaslight. As she and her mother are clients of George's, or, as he kindly puts it, 'of ours,' the young woman's history may interest you. Educated in a convent, when seventeen years old Miss Dargie married a worthless rake of a fellow in direct opposition to her mother's wishes. For two years she led a wretched existence. Six months ago she obtained a divorce, when, by a decree of the court, she resumed her maiden name. Soon afterwards the ex-husband renewed his love-making. To prevent a re-marriage Mrs. Dargie took her daughter away from Santa Barbara, where all the interested parties reside, to some Springs in the northern part of the State. There they remained in comparative quiet—barring the fact that a young man who was staying at the Springs developed a most persistent fondness for Miss Dargie's society—until Mrs. Dargie was called home on business. Not wishing, under the circumstances, to leave her daughter at the Springs, Mrs. Dargie brought her to San Francisco, where, after placing her in George's care, she left for Santa Barbara, promising to return in one week. That was two weeks ago. George says, 'Playing chaperon isn't what it is cracked up to be.' I can see he is tired of the responsibility and will be glad when the mother returns.

"But enough of this old woman's gossip. What an interminably long, prosy letter this is, to be sure, and all about three or four people. However, should it bore you, remember it's partially your fault for insisting that everyone I might meet would interest you. Never mind, dear; after a little I shall know more people and gather more experiences to write about. Meanwhile what does it matter when we love each other—nothing else counts. Good-night, sweetheart, sweet dreams. Now and forever, your

"ROY."

"SAN FRANCISCO, February 27, 1901.

"MY DEAREST: How I longed for you Saturday—not that my longing is intermittent, but that day I took a long walk out to the Presidio Heights, where a great many houses are being built, and selected our home. That is, it shall be ours if you like it as well as I do after see-



ing the plans. One great advantage is that, as the house is not yet completed, you can make your own selections for the interior finishing; another—but I won't enumerate—you can judge for yourself from the photographs and plans which I enclose. What pleasure we'll take together setting up our household gods! I can hardly wait when I think of sitting down three times a day—for I shall come home to luncheon—at our own dining-table—just we two—in front of a big bay-window which overlooks the Golden Gate, with Tamalpais in the distance. The view, with the blue bay in the foreground, is magnificent; you will *love* it. As for me, I shall be more in love with a certain little lady who will be sitting opposite me. Do you know her? February, March, April! You see, I am still counting.

"Thank you for liking my drawings of the office. I feel flattered, knowing that Nature never intended me for a draughtsman. As you suggested, I moved the roller-top desk nearer the east window and pulled the revolving bookcase out from the corner. The light is better. It takes a woman to arrange things, after all, even if she is at the other side of the continent and has to do her arranging by proxy. Eh, sweetheart?

"By the way, I've been proxying for George lately in the capacity of watch-dog and general utility man, much to his secret amusement. George is an A No. 1 fellow, but he has one fault: he can't say 'No.' Instead, he invariably promises to do whatever people ask of him and, when it suits him, as invariably turns the job over to someone else. When I first arrived he began by enlisting my sympathies in Miss Dargie's behalf, gradually getting into the habit of asking me to do this and that errand for her until—presto!—before I realized it I became the one she asked favors of, not George. Confound him!

"Truly it has been a long five weeks doing my duty without you, and I confess I am not sorry that Mrs. Dargie arrives this afternoon. She is to meet her daughter here in the office, as she telephoned that on no account was Madge to be allowed to go to the train. Two nights ago Mr. Gray, the ex-husband, forced his way into Mrs. Dargie's presence, and a terrible scene ensued because she refused to tell him where her daughter was. Madge fainted when we told her about it, but Mrs. George, with rare presence of mind, seized the water-pitcher, and a liberal sprinkling of water soon revived her. Actually Mrs. George looked as if she enjoyed baptizing the poor girl; she doesn't like Miss Dargie, you know, and is constantly misunderstanding her. As for me, I can't help feeling sorry for her. She certainly needs her mother, for she is altogether too young to be alone.

"You ask if the young man from the Springs is as much in evidence as ever. More so; at least the stream of theatre tickets, candy, and flowers has flowed steadily on ever since his arrival in San Fran-

cisco. Mrs. George says he is too nice a boy and too much in love to be played with and then thrown aside; that's what she thinks Miss Dargie is doing, and she may be right, for there are numerous mysterious telegrams and telephones arriving daily. George insists that they emanate from Mr. Gray, and that it will only be a question of time before Miss Dargie returns to her first love. Heigh-ho, women are queer creatures, and to mere stupid man incomprehensible! Excuse me, dear, won't you? I don't mean *all* women.

"Mrs. Dargie has just arrived. I can hear her now in George's private office. There's a perfect babel of tongues. Every one seems to be talking at once. I wish they'd leave me out of it. But they won't; Miss Dargie's wants have become chronic. What is a man to do under the circumstances? He can't be a boor. George is calling me through the speaking-tube. Dearest, that means that I must say good-by for this time, and I haven't even said—I love you. Now, as always, your

"ROY."

"SAN FRANCISCO, March 29, 1901.

"DEAREST: What did you imagine my last letter meant? Surely the March winds must have been playing sad havoc with your fancy, for I never intimated that I desired to control your actions any more than you have—or ever will, I hope—desire to control mine. Why should I? We are both free agents. Does the fact of the existence of our engagement give either one of us the right to pass judgment upon the other? No; for, as individuals possessing differing personalities, how can we grasp each other's point of view? As lovers—ah, that's a different story! Then, we forget and forgive.

"You say, 'Write me all about your clients and cases.' Don't I, always? My letters are so full of my work and the people I am working for that sometimes I'm ashamed of them; still, I ramble on, secure in the thought that you will understand. In the case of *Stone vs. Rock*, which I wrote you was on the calendar for the third week in March, you will rejoice with me that a fifty-thousand-dollar verdict was given the plaintiff—our client. The Brown trial comes on to-morrow. George was to have summed up the case, but he's had no time to look over the evidence, and I get the last chance at the jury. Poor George! There may be advantages in having wealthy clients who depend absolutely upon their lawyer for everything from a monetary standpoint, but from a purely personal one the disadvantages more than counter-balance.

"For the past month, ever since Mrs. Dargie's return, neither she nor her daughter has scarcely dared move without consulting George. The last few days have been unusually exciting, which accounts for the

brief note I wrote you Sunday. A friend telephoned from Santa Barbara stating that Mr. Gray had started for San Francisco, threatening to kill both Mrs. Dargie and Madge. At that, Mrs. Dargie asked George to inform the Chief of Police, and the ladies' apartments at the Palace have since assumed some of the characteristics of an army post. A ferret-eyed, undersized detective does triple duty as commandant, sentry, and striker, while the role of scout is alternately filled by George, the young man from the Springs, and myself—when it can't be helped. So far we haven't succeeded in locating Mr. Gray, though we've had all the trains from the South watched. We think he didn't come; but the ladies are positive he is in the city, hiding, lying in wait for them. Meanwhile the young man from the Springs, who is a fine fellow and desperately in love, urges immediate marriage, pleading that if Madge is once his wife, he will have the right to protect her. Mrs. Dargie, fearing a possible reconciliation between her daughter and Mr. Gray, approves of the marriage if it can be carried out,—the laws of this State requiring one year to elapse after divorce is granted before either party can remarry,—but Madge objects.

"I was called away just then by a telephone from Mrs. Dargie. She said that George had found an old clergyman friend who was willing to perform the ceremony—they were to charter a tug and go out to sea—if only they could gain Madge's consent. Would I come over at once to the hotel and add my influence—which she was kind enough to say was considerable—to theirs towards hastening the marriage? How could I refuse? Well, I went and found Mrs. Dargie alone. She had grown thin and pale. Somehow my manner must have told her I was sorry for her. In that, and that alone, before God, Edith, was I to blame for what followed. After we had shaken hands I briefly stated my errand. Although she was extremely nervous, she did not speak until I had finished; then she walked over to the window and looked out a moment. When she turned—so innocent, so childlike, so helpless—it made my heart ache to see her.

"'You say that my marriage will simplify matters?' she asked. 'That it will be best for me—for my mother, who has done so much for me? I should do as she wishes? That is your advice?'

I bowed affirmatively.

"'Even if I don't love the man?' and then, before I could answer, she added, coming close, and gazing at me as if she would look me through and through, 'If—if it were—you——'

"Edith, upon my honor, I never was so at a loss for words. I couldn't think. The only thing to do was to come away.

"George, who has since joined me at the office, says they found her in a swoon. They didn't know what had passed between us, but as she

has promised to marry the young man from the Springs day after to-morrow they think that I influenced her. Perhaps I did. I have told George that I will not be a witness at the marriage ceremony, but I did not tell him why.

"Oh, if you were only near me! If ever I've needed you, it has been this past month and now—now, Edith! Why aren't you here?"

"Roy."

"HOTEL RAFAEL, April 3, 1901.

"*To Miss Edith Ralston.*

"I enclose a newspaper clipping that will tell you all. I don't know how it happened,—but it's done. God forgive me! I'm a brute!

"ROYAL BELMONT.

"'MARRIED at sea, April 2, 1901, by Rev. Abel Abercrombie, Royal D. Belmont, of New York City, to Margaret Dargie, of Santa Barbara, California. Boston and New York papers please copy.'"



## SUMMER IN THE SOUTH

BY PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR

THE oriole sings in the greening grove  
 As if he were half-way waiting,  
 The rosebuds peep from their hoods of green,  
 Timid and hesitating.  
 The rain comes down in a torrent sweep  
 And the nights smell warm and piney,  
 The garden thrives, but the tender shoots  
 Are yellow-green and tiny.  
 Then a flash of sun on a waiting hill,  
 Streams laugh that erst were quiet,  
 The sky smiles down with a dazzling blue  
 And the woods run mad with riot



## REBIRTH

BY CHARLES HANSON TOWNE

WHAT of those songs the poet leaves unsung?  
 Do they go forth with him on Death's long trail?  
 So once I dreamed, until my heart was wrung  
 By the sad singing of a nightingale!

# THE MENDACITY OF MR. RIGGS

*By C. Yarnall Abbott*



WHEN Mr. Hector Montgomery Riggs awakened suddenly at the chilly and mournful hour of three A.M. it was with the distinct feeling that something was wrong. This feeling became a certainty as he opened his eyes in the dim light cast by the street-lamp outside. Before the open drawer of his handsome dressing-table stood a man engaged in deftly and almost noiselessly going through its contents.

Though Mr. Riggs had not consciously moved, his visitor seemed instantly aware of his awakening, for he turned and regarded him intently.

The burglar was a small man, slim and slightly built,—not at all the typical midnight marauder,—but the situation was sufficiently startling, nevertheless.

"Wh—what are you doing there?" demanded Mr. Riggs quite unnecessarily. His tone was not, perhaps, as peremptory as it might have been, but allowances must be made for the nerves of a quiet, middle-aged gentleman so suddenly awakened.

"What the h—— do you think?" responded the burglar genially. He changed his position slightly and resumed his occupation, keeping, the while, an eye on his unwilling host.

"What do you mean, sir? This is an outrage! Leave this house at once! I shall call the police!" cried the latter. He had overcome the unfortunate tendency of his voice to tremble and felt that he was handling this difficult situation rather well.

"Look er here!" said the burglar, "you've got to cut that out, see? If yer don't talk, yer won't get hurt, but if yer bother me I'll knock yer d——d bald head off, see?" He produced a small but unpleasant-looking weapon, made of black leather with a lump at the end, and laid it before him, then resumed the inspection of the contents of the dressing-table.

Mr. Riggs shuddered. He felt that it was incumbent upon him to do something—but what? He was practically alone in the house, for Mrs. Riggs and the children were still, so to speak, being swept by ocean breezes, and the two servants were, presumably, enjoying well-earned

repose two floors above him. He considered various expedients: he might shout loudly for help. No, the black weapon was very convenient to the burglar's hand. He might suddenly spring upon the villain and by main strength overpower and bind him. No, decidedly; that would not be practicable. Mr. Riggs felt that he must consider his importance to his family and to the community. Better—far better—would it be that he should suffer the loss of a few trifles than that he should fight for his life with a desperate scoundrel like this. Decidedly, the wisest course was to lie still. He lay still.

The desperate scoundrel seemed to find nothing which took his fancy in the drawers of the dressing-table. Enlarging his field of operations, he extracted a roll of bills from the pocket of Mr. Riggs's waistcoat as it hung decorously over the back of a chair.

"Say, bo," he said, "that's not all you've got. Where's the rest?"

"I—I refuse to answer," said Mr. Riggs with decision.

"Oh, 'scuse me," said the burglar. He chuckled, but his manner changed instantly as he seized the little black weapon and advanced a step towards the bed.

"You don't want to get gay!" he said, with a threatening gesture.

Mr. Riggs subsided promptly.

"My wallet is under my pillow," he murmured.

"Now yer shoutin'," said the burglar. "No, you keep yer hands down; I'll git it."

He inserted a grimy hand and dragged it out.

"And here's yer turnip too."

From the same hiding-place he extracted the poor gentleman's handsome repeater.

"I don't think that was right straight of you," he continued reproachfully. "Suppose I hadn't a-found that ticker?"

He straightened himself and cast a quick look about the room.

"Now, then," he said sharply, "where's yer wife's stuff—jools and things?"

A fortunate diversion relieved Mr. Riggs from the embarrassing necessity of replying. Through the open door of an adjoining room came the sound of heavy footsteps in the yard below and the rapping of a club on the pavement.

In an instant the burglar had dropped watch and money into a capacious pocket, had unlocked the door into the hall, and disappeared through it. Down the stairs he stumbled, and in a moment more the front door closed quietly behind him.

Mr. Riggs arose hastily. A ladder had been placed from the yard to the rear window, and up it, to the accompaniment of stertorous puffing, clambered a large policeman.



Mr. Riggs received him with all the dignity compatible with a suit of baby-blue pajamas.

"It was a burglar," he said. "He has escaped by the front door."

The officer nodded judicially.

"They ain't no use chasin' him now," said he; "we'll ketch him in the morning all right, all right! I seen the ladder when I com' by, so I sez to myself, 'I'll drop up,' I sez. What did he get?"

They investigated. Except for the money and watch, the loss was trifling.

Mr. Riggs told his story:

"I was awakened by the villain," said he, "just as he was about making his escape. I seized him, of course——"

"Sure!" interjected the policeman sympathetically.

"But he held me by the throat with one hand while he ran downstairs with the other—I mean, he threw me down and ran."

"He must 'a' been a big devil," said the officer with deep interest. "Say, that'll be Beef Nolan. I seen him hangin' round here the other night. What was he, a big fellow, six feet two, two hundred pounds, scar on cheek, front teeth out, sandy hair?"

"I—I think so," said Mr. Riggs, a little overwhelmed by his own mendacity.

"That's all right then. You go back to bed. I'll take away the ladder. He won't bother you again." He descended as he had come and disappeared in the darkness with his burden.

Before Mr. Riggs had finished his toilet a few hours later the doorbell had rung several times. A flustered maid bore him the intelligence that the parlor was full of gentlemen—reporters, they said.

To an interested circle with yellow copy-paper and flying pencils he told his story once more,—simply and with dignity, as becomes a hero. Perhaps a reasonable amount of exaggeration might be forgiven in one who had lived through so strenuous an experience, but we shudder at the height to which he must have reached to warrant the following, which appeared in that afternoon's *News*:

#### "BURGLARY!"

"THE HOUSE OF A PROMINENT BANKER ENTERED!"

"DESPERATE BATTLE IN THE DARKNESS."

"MR. H. M. RIGGS FIGHTS FOR HIS LIFE WITH HEAVILY  
ARMED SCOUNDREL."

"At a late hour last night burglars entered the palatial Walnut Street residence of Mr. Hector Montgomery Riggs, Cashier of the Twelfth National Bank and well known in social and financial circles. The scoundrels effected an entrance by means of a ladder from the yard, and would, doubt-

## The Mendacity of Mr. Riggs

less, have ransacked the house but for the signal bravery of Mr. Riggs, who, awakened by a slight noise, grappled, bare-handed, with the heavily armed villains. His desperate resistance so intimidated the miscreants that they did not use their weapons, but were finally glad to make good their escape, taking with them only Mr. Riggs's watch—a handsome timepiece presented to him by his associates at the bank—and a large sum of money, of which they were able to lay hold during the *melée*.

"The police of the Twenty-seventh District are working on the case and hope to have the gang of marauders behind the bars in the near future. The leader of the gang is described by Mr. Riggs as a perfect giant in physique, and armed to the teeth, a fact which indicates even more strongly the courage and nerve displayed by the banker.

"Fortunately, Mrs. Riggs and the three charming children were still at their country home at Beachhurst and were spared the annoyance and distress of the painful incident.

"Mr. Riggs, who is a member of the United and Aldine Clubs and a host of other organizations, spent to-day at home, resting, and receiving the congratulations of his many friends on his heroism."

As a matter of fact, it was anything rather than a restful day for the hitherto quiet banker. Friends, reporters, detectives, beset him all day. To all he told his story, and to each with a growing plenitude of detail. The somewhat strained tale into which he had stumbled the night before through a vague feeling that the truth would render him ridiculous seemed less and less extravagant with each repetition. In fact, by evening he had arrived at a state of mind in which he believed everything—~~or~~ nearly everything—that he told.

Seeking new worlds to conquer, he strolled down to his club at twilight. He was received with quite unusual empressement. Men whom he hardly knew came up to him with hearty congratulations. He was pointed out to strangers. Compliments and more tangible offerings in the shape of cocktails and cigars were pressed upon him. He was overwhelmed with invitations to dinner.

And right nobly did he sustain this new-found fame. Nothing could have been finer, more simple, more restrained than his manner when, at the extempore dinner given in his honor and in answer to tumultuous solicitations, he told his story once more. Through frequent rehearsals he had unconsciously learnt to give to the narrative the one touch necessary to its perfecting,—that of the embarrassment of a brave man at unsought honors, belittling his feats, deprecating the homage of the world. His hearers rose and cheered to the echo, and even the gouty old gentlemen in the reading-room refrained from writing letters to the House Committee when they learnt the cause of the commotion.

It would have been a daring footpad who could have mustered courage to attack the dignified and martial gentleman who strode home that night with chest expanded and walking-stick firmly held.

Another ovation awaited Mr. Riggs at the bank the following morning. The President, Mr. Coggsell, arrived a half hour earlier than usual and still further departed from his usual custom by smoking a cigar with the hero in the latter's cosy office. They discussed, with Mr. Rogers, the vice-president, who had also dropped in, the general subject of burglary, embellished with instances from Mr. Riggs's experience.

"Yes," the latter was saying, "it was an emergency which might well have shaken the stoutest nerves. I must confess that there was a moment when I really feared that I should not be able to prevent the scoundrel from reaching his weapons. I feel that it was only the quickness and determination of my onslaught and the fact that I was fighting for life itself that enabled me to overcome the enormous advantage given the robber by his great strength and weight. Given an antagonist of anything like my own size, I think I may now say without boasting that the result would have been somewhat different. At the same time," he continued modestly, "I feel that there has been altogether too much made of this little matter. I am sure that no one in my place could have acted differently. In fact, I may say that my principal emotion at this time is—of—er—embarrassment at the thought that my strength did not prove sufficient to enable me to capture the villain."

"Mr. Riggs," said the President solemnly, "I fully understand that your modesty impels you to belittle your bravery, but I think I may speak both for myself and my fellow-directors when I say that we fully realize that, had it not been for your superb display of those qualities of personal courage which in these days are so seldom shown, had it not been, sir, for the intrepidity of your conduct, the Twelfth National, sir, would have been to-day without a cashier. It will be through no lack of effort on my part, sir, if the board shall not vote you a substantial recognition, therefore, of your services to it and to this honored institution.

The tinkle of his 'phone bell interrupted Mr. Riggs as he sought for fitting words with which to reply.

"Hullo," said a strange voice, "hullo, is this Mr. Riggs? Well, this is Chief of Detectives Kelly at City Hall. We've got a man down here that we'd like you to take a look at. He don't answer your description exactly, but we've got the evidence to connect him with another burglary in your neighborhood and we'd like you to see him. Can you drop in this afternoon? Four o'clock? All right. Good-by."

Thus it came to pass that Mr. Riggs, accompanied by his two fellow-

officers, who had refused to forsake him in this ordeal, crossed for the first time the threshold of a police station.

Detective Kelly greeted them with cordiality.

"Say, that must have been a peach scrap you put up the other night," said he to the Cashier, as he led the way to an open space on which fronted a dismal row of grated doors. "I don't hardly think this is your man, but it won't do any harm for you to take a look at him. We haven't traced your watch yet, but they wouldn't try to hock that for a while. Hey, Jimmy, bring out that crook that Bates got this morning."

From a cell half-way down the row Jimmy, the burly turnkey, produced a man. He was certainly not the desperate giant of Mr. Riggs's description. Small, slight, and consumptive-looking, he hardly reached to the banker's shoulder.

"Say, boss," he began, "I ain't done nothing. You never seen me before, did yer, boss?"

"Shut up!" remarked Jimmy perfunctorily.

From above his expanse of fair white waistcoat Mr. Riggs looked down upon his visitor of two nights before. He realized that the tables were turned, and he thirsted for revenge. There was no doubt in his mind as to the man's identity. He was certainly the wretch who robbed him. At the same time, the situation was distinctly delicate. If he denounced this puny scoundrel, what would become of his newly found fame. Prompt action was required.

Mr. Riggs cleared his throat judicially.

"This is not the villain who robbed me," he said, "my man was a *big* man."

But as Mr. Riggs turned away he caught the barest flicker of a smile in the eyes of the burglar.



## FRIENDSHIP

BY MARION PELTON GUILD

THESE days and those days,  
And all of life between!  
Dream days, rose days,  
And fading leaves for green!  
But constant as this heart that beats  
To one unaltered tune,  
O friend, thy soul exhales its sweets  
In Love's perpetual June.



# AN HEIR TO MILLIONS

BY

FREDERIC REDDALE

AUTHOR OF "THE OTHER MAN"



PHILADELPHIA

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY

1903

**COPYRIGHT, 1903, BY  
J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY  
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED**

**PRINTED BY J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY, PHILADELPHIA, U. S. A.**